



Cometh Up as a Flower, Volume II

Rhoda Broughton

DODO



PRESS

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COMETH UP AS A FLOWER.

An Autobiography.

"Is the old man yet alive? "

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CHAPTER I.

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting; The soul that rises with us,
our life's star, Hath elsewhere had its setting, And cometh from afar."

IS that true? Have we existed in other states of being as many poets and many non-poets dimly conjecture? Is this life our beginning though we know it not to be our ending? or is it only one of a series of existences through which we pass? Now and then flashing reminiscences—reminiscences of things we know positively not to have happened in this life—dart, across our minds, recognition in a smell or a sound of something we have met with, something we have had to do with, somehow, somewhere, sometime. Whence can such reminiscences, such recognitions come, but from some pre-existence? Our draught of Lethe has not been quite deep enough.

But even without those dim hintings at recollections of a former state, our utter forgetfulness of ever having been in life, under any form before our present one, is no argument against the existence of such a previous life, for what faintest remembrance have we of our first year? Does any glimmering of memory illumine those days when we lay on our nurse's lap, sprawling, making faces, sucking?

Are there only a certain number of old souls which continually go in and out of an ever new succession of bodies? And if we did exist in some former state, was it a higher or a lower one? Were we beasts or angels? Have we fallen or risen?

There is no light whatever on the past. Thank God there is in the Future enough to enable us to walk soberly, heedfully, warily, on towards the fuller light, which will dawn on us on that— "Marge beyond the tomb." Southey, in his "Doctor," makes his hero maintain, half in jest and half in earnest, that he was able to recognize, in the personal appearance, habits and dispositions of many of those around him, the different animals which, in a former state, their spirits had inhabited.

Truly there is none of us who cannot point out a pig or two, a sheep or a mule, among his acquaintance. If Dolly had ever pre-existed, it must have been in the shape of one of the feline tribe; not a comfortable old tabby sitting staid beside the hearth, and putting up her head to be tickled, but a tigress or a panther, sleek, lithe,

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beautiful, stealthy. There lacked to her but the eyed skin, the outward beast form; her spirit had remained the pard-spirit of her former life, when she lived in jungles; tangled, torrid swamps, and lay in wait to pounce on deer, and kid, and man.

Turning day into night, I slept on, till the afternoon, till the sun came round to my side of the house, and woke me, blazing down hot and full on the bed whereon I lay through the uncurtained, unshuttered windows. When I did wake, it was to the consciousness of a sufficiently bad headache. For some little time I lay motionless, on the border land between sleeping and waking; feeling nothing much, wishing nothing much, thinking of nothing much except myself as a mere animal; my headache, my vertigo, and my heat. I was fully roused at length by the door handle turning softly, the door opening, and some one coming in. Some one came over to the bed, and bent over me; some one was Dolly.

"Awake, are you? have you quite recovered your adventure? " she says, in a key so sweet and low, that it does not jar on my aching cranium, as almost any other sound would. She would make the divinest sick nurse, would Dolly. My senses come back to me, full and strong. Dolly has treated me despitely; there shall be no peace with her; war to the knife with Dolly. I fixed my eyes steadily upon her, from among my tumbled pillows.

"I don't want to speak to you, " I said, "you tell lies! "

"Do I? " said Dolly, unruffled. "I daresay; I never yet met a person who did not, and I hope I never shall, for they would necessarily be very disagreeable; a certain amount of fibs is essential to the existence of society; did you never hear that? "

I refuse to be led from the concrete to the abstract.

"You made mischief between me and Dick. You prevented him from driving me to Wilton, " I cry, with raised voice, knives running through my head under my exertions.

"If Dick, as you call him, has forgiven me, don't you think you might? " she says, gently.

If Dick had forgiven her! How that quiet implication stung me! I roll my head restlessly from side to side.

"What object could you have had in doing it? Had you any object at all, or was it only pure malice?"

Dolly smiles and sits down on the side of the bed; she perceives we are going to have a squabble, and she does not see why we should not have it out comfortably.

"What a foolish child you were not to get into bed," she says with affability; "lying down in one's clothes does not rest one in the least; now, you know, to-night you'll look quite green."

"Was it pure malice?" I reiterate, disregarding this digression.

"Nobody but a fiend would think of doing anything out of pure malice, I should say," returns my sister, sedately, "and I'm not a fiend yet, that I know of; malice had neither part nor lot in the matter."

"Did you want to ride with him yourself?" I ask, vehemently; "are you fond of him too?"

Dolly smiles again; a little amused, compassionate smile, and shrugs her shoulders.

"Am I given to being fond of men, merely for being long-legged and poor, which I confess seem to me the most salient points in your dear Dick's character?"

"Any one would have said you thought he had a good many good points in his character, who saw the way you looked at him yesterday," I cry, choking with indignation.

"My dear, did I make my own eyes? Can I help it, if they have any peculiar way of exercising themselves; Providence made them, and Providence must answer for their vagaries."

"If you have such a contempt for poverty, why did you waste so much time and trouble; why did you tell lies, and make me perfectly miserable, merely to get that which, when you had got it, you thought worthless?" I asked bitterly.

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"My good child, for once I was unselfish; cannot you believe that?" asks Dolly, playfully, and laying her cool slim hand on my burning forehead.

"I had no plans for myself whatever; certainly no designs on our mutual friend, with the crack-jaw Scotch name; it rather bored me than otherwise ambling along beside him, for heaven knows how many hours, in the broiling sun!"

I am dumbfounded, and lie staring at her with boundless wonder in my wide-open eyes.

"What upon earth did you do it for, then?" I gasp, slowly; "once for all, tell me what object you had, or whether you had any?"

"Will you have some Eau de Cologne on your head?" she asks; and as she is sprinkling scented drops over me, "An object?" says she, "yes, to be sure; who but an idiot ever does anything without an object? I have no objection whatever to tell you mine either, if you'll listen to it like a sensible woman, and not scream at the top of your voice, as you have been doing for the last quarter of an hour; if you must know the truth, I intended you to drive with Sir Hugh. Was not it charitable of me? he looked so disconsolate, poor little wretch!"

"Why did you want me to drive with him?" I ask in blank astonishment.

"Because, my dear, I wish and intend that you should drive through life with him; because I hope, before I die, to see you Lady Lancaster."

"That you never will," I cry, with flaming cheeks, starting up in bed, and fumbling with the counterpane.

"Ah! perhaps not; at present you prefer the idea of riding in the baggage-waggon after Daddy Longlegs, with several little M'Gregors, male and female, clinging about your skirts!"

So Dolly, softly inhaling Eau de Cologne as she speaks. I fling myself back among the pillows, and am thankful for the shade afforded by my loosened hair—a shade which partially veils the blush that I feel creeping all over my body.

"How coarse you are! " I murmur.

"Very likely, " says Dolly, "common sense always is coarse; but my being ever so coarse won't make the baggage-waggon an easier mode of conveyance, nor will it pay Romeo and Juliet's butcher's bills."

"What is it to you whether they are ever paid? " I am emboldened by the protection of my tangled locks to ask; "why cannot you let us be happy in our own way? "

"Us be happy, indeed! " says Dolly, a little contemptuously. "Are you so sure about Romeo? because I'm not; Romeo likes coats from Poole; he likes billiards and Château Lafitte, and actresses; of course he does; he keeps them in the background now, but you are even a greater ninny than I take you for, if you cannot believe that they are there, out of sight somewhere. Will he be content, do you suppose, with poky lodgings and a dirty parlour maid, and shoulder of mutton and rice pudding, even with you to sweeten them? "

I writhe in silent anguish; but her logic is unanswerable. What equivalent am I for billiards and Château Lafitte, and actresses?

"It's something quite new your taking such an interest in my concerns, " I say presently. "I cannot see what it would matter to you if I were to run away with a tinker. "

"I don't think a tinker's arms would quarter well with the Lestranges', " says she, laughing, "and I should not like to have to allude to my sister Madame la Chaudronnière. " Then falling into gravity again, "I don't pretend to any great disinterestedness in the matter; my motive for endeavouring to prevent your marrying Major M'Gregor, is no particularly tender regard for your interests; it is simply this, that by marrying a pauper, as, from all I can make out, I believe our worthy dragoon to be, you will drag down our family, and me of course with it, even lower than it has already fallen, though it seems pretty nearly at the bottom of the ladder as it is. "

I toss about restlessly. I feel that there is a flaw somewhere in her worldly wisdom, but I cannot detect it.

"Whereas, " pursues Dolly, rising and pacing up the room, "if you marry Sir Hugh—"

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"Never, " I cry, interrupting her; "I'd rather be flayed alive! Ugh! married to Hugh! I should be dead of disgust in a week! Faugh! "

Dolly pauses before a cheval-glass, and considers herself—not with vanity—for vanity in her was not, but reflectively, appraisingly; looked at her small snaky head; at her coiled cables of ink-black hair; at her tall, svelte figure.

"Don't you see, you stupid child, that I'm only giving you the advice that I always give and take myself? " she says. "Am I more in love with Hugh's attractions than you are? not I; as I see him, he's a good-natured, wooden-headed old booby; but for all that, if he were to come in here this minute (don't be alarmed, he'd hardly be so ill-mannered) and say to me, 'Miss Lestrangle, will you marry me? ' or, 'Dolly, will you be mine? ' wouldn't I respond, 'Yes, dear Hugh, that I will, and thank you kindly; ' I'd swear to love, honour, and obey, not him, not him; (with a gesture of contempt), but his £12,000 a year, his French cook, and his opera-box, and I'd keep my vow, too! "

"I wish to goodness he would ask you! " I groan.

"Is there, " pursues Dolly, warming with her theme (it's not often she thinks it worth while wasting so much breath on anything female) "is there any old lord between the three seas, so old, so mumbling, so wicked, that I would not joyfully throw myself into his horrid palsied old arms, if he had but money; money! money! money is power; money is a god! "

I sit with my legs dangling over the side of the bed listening.

"It may be yours, " I say; "it is not mine. What do women want with power? What would they do with it when they had got it? Love is worth all the power in the world! "

"Pooh! I did not know that any one after sixteen or before sixty, believed in that venerable old imposture now-a-days; love is another name for selfishness! " says Dolly, recommencing her walk, and sweeping up and down.

"It cannot be selfishness to live altogether in and for another person, " object I, thinking that I have nailed her there.

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"Worldly wisdom and sordid common sense, " continues she, "would make you marry Hugh, sacrifice your own passions, give a lift to the poor old family, the de- pression of which is breaking papa's heart—it's a pity you've always made such a fuss about your devotion to him, isn't it—and relieve him of more than half his cares; on the other hand, Love, noble, beautiful, be-poetized Love, will make you hurl yourself at the not particularly delighted head of that big Scotchman—you will have no money, no position, no power for good or evil, but your passion will be gratified; you will be put in possession of that very luxuriant moustache, and those very broad shoulders, and having them, you can afford to let papa's 'grey hairs go down with sorrow to the grave, ' as somebody's in the Bible did; cannot you, dear? "

She opens the door and passes out; I call after her, "Dolly, Dolly, come back! " but she either does not or will not hear.

CHAPTER II.

"MACBETH has murdered sleep! " and Dolly had murdered mine. Much good to shake up the pillows, to smooth the coverlet, and turning round compose oneself resolutely to the continuation of one's unfinished snooze; much good to think of a key, or the wards of a lock, or the legs of a chair, or anything else as intensely unexciting.

I am Orestes, and Dolly has hounded on the Erinnyes on my track. My Furies are—like the original ones that pursued Orestes, —three in number, viz. : Dick's poverty, as impeding our union, and docking his luxuries, (of which I grudged him but one item), not as affecting myself, for from my youth up I had been hard up, and should not have known what it felt like to be otherwise: Dick's jealousy of Hugh, and Dick's flirtation with Dolly.

I had not sense enough to see that I need not worry myself about all three at once; since any two of them were exclusive of the third, as for example, that if Dick was going to jilt me, his want of money would in nowise prejudice me: be rather a matter of rejoicing, —or, that if Dick was jealous of Hugh, he was the less likely to be in love with Dolly.

All three of them, Megæra, Tisiphone, and Alecto, crowd their ugly faces round, and grin at me, and I have not strength to combat them.

After about a quarter of an hour, which seems to me about two full hours, I jump up. I have no watch, as you know, but I hear a clock ticking on the landing outside. I open the door, and peep out. Only five o'clock! An hour and a half till dressing time! I will go down. Fortune favours the brave, and I suppose also the fair, as they are mostly put in the same category, and I might meet Dick in the passages, or the stairs, in the billiard-room; as Christabel says, "All may yet be well! " (though that is rather an ill-omened quotation, for all was not well in her case), and at the worst, the society of my fellow-creatures, even though they are not Dicks, is pleasanter than my own.

At the morning-room door I stop and listen; not with any eaves-dropping intention, but simply to try and detect those tones that I foolishly imagine would wake me "Had lain for a century dead! "

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Lain for a century dead indeed! It is all very well, and a pretty conceit to say so in a love song, but it will require a louder than human voice to re-form those scattered dust particles into the marvellous image, of which the great God Himself condescended to be the model.

The tones I seek are not detectable; I hear instead ever so many women's voices; young and old, croaky and mellow. Nearly all the women, half of the Wentworth party, is scattered about the many cornered room, in groups of twos and threes. Each is provided with a cup of tea, and all have apparently just come in from walking; judging by the large show of Mrs. Heath's and Mrs. Brown's hats that are lying about, and by the display of a great many pairs of trimmest Balmorals. Lady Capel (the fat Viscountess) stands by the table, in a charming little point-lace bonnet, chatting with Miss Seymour. I think it makes her feel comfortable to look at anything so thin.

She has had the post of honour this afternoon; and has been out driving with Lady Lancaster in the sociable. Honour and pleasure are not Siamese twins in this world. Our hostess also bonneted (in the literal and not metaphorical sense), is button-holing another philanthropic old woman, on the subject of the Shoe Black Brigade. As I come in, she turns round and utters an exclamation of surprise, "Come down after all! So glad! Your sister gave us such a sad account of you, that we were afraid we were going to lose you for all the evening; there does not seem much the matter now, does there?" patting my cheek as she would have patted the cheek of the Hottentot Venus, if Sir Hugh had seen fit to throw his Sultanic Majesty's pocket-handkerchief to her.

"You are quite a heroine, my dear!" says Lady Capel kindly, "we are all dying to hear your version of this unlucky contretemps!"

"Men are so stupid!" cries the sharp young lady, whose name is Miss Gifford, coming over from the other side of the room, "they never know how to tell a story; they always leave out all the details, which are the most important parts."

"It must have been a great shock, and—very embarrassing," says Miss Seymour, in that whiny-piny voice, with which an inscrutable Providence has seen fit to visit her.

"I should have put on my seven-league boots, and set off walking home!" says Miss Gifford smartly. She would have done nothing of the kind, as indeed she would have given all her back hair, and two or three of her fingers for a six or seven hours' nocturnal tête-à-tête with Sir Hugh.

"It was very fortunate that it was not one of the other young men," says Lady Lancaster, stiffly; "it certainly was a trying position for a young woman to be placed in; and you could not have found yourself in better hands than my son's."

I receive this assurance in silence, and bite my lips. Perceiving that I am pro. tem. a small lion, and am expected to roar in my humble way, I execute a slight mugissement. "I don't know much about it, except that the horses were frightened at the train—they had been rather frisky all along, I thought—and then they ran away, and upset me into the hedge bank. I don't know where they upset anybody else, and then I suppose I fainted, for I don't recollect anything else, until I woke up in that inn-parlour. Ugh!" (with a shiver of aversion at the remembrance.)

"Poor child, it must have been very disagreeable!" Lady Capel says good-naturedly, fat women mostly are good-natured, whether it is a cause or an effect I cannot say.

"Dreadful!" I answer emphatically, "I never was so miserable in my life!" Lady Lancaster takes my emphasized remark as a personal affront.

"You should have been very thankful, my dear, that your life was spared," she says rather rebukingly, "and that you were with a person Who would be sure to take such excellent care of you!"

"What on earth did you do all those hours?" puts in Miss Gifford, rather quickly, to save us a sermon, "talk, or go to sleep, or play picquet! oh, I suppose they had not such a thing as a pack of cards in the house, had they?"

"I looked at Sir Hugh's watch half the time, and read an awful book about the End of the World, and the Third Vial the other half," I answer rather grimly.

They all laugh except Lady Lancaster.

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"What a picture! " "How wretched! " "I cannot imagine anything more dreary! " "And what did Sir Hugh read? Drelincourt on Death? " (this is from Miss Gifford).

"He read nothing! "

"Poor man! he was worse off than you even; how did he amuse himself then? smoked? took a nap? "

"He did nothing, he sat quiet. "

"You don't seem to have been very sociable, " remarks Miss Gifford, with sprightliness, "nor to have taken much pains to entertain one another. "

My thoughts fly back to poor Hugh's well meant efforts to entertain me, and I feel myself blushing.

"Did nobody miss us? " I ask hastily, fiddling with my tea cup, "was no one ever coming to look for us? "

"Oh, I believe there were people hunting for you all over the country half the night, only they did not manage to find you somehow; weren't there Lady Lancaster? "

"They went the wrong road, " replies our hostess, sitting very upright, and looking over her spectacles, "that was how the mistake arose. Hugh never was known to come by that lower road in his life before; it is three miles longer too; I cannot imagine what possessed him. "

I can imagine, and I dive under the table after an imaginary pocket-handkerchief.

"Aren't you very much shaken and bruised? " asks Miss Seymour, making up her face into a sympathetic shape.

"Oh, yes! I'm black and blue from top to toe. "

"My dear child! why did not you say so before? " says Lady Lancaster, very kindly, though fussily, as 'tis her nature to, "and I would have sent my maid with some arnica for you; it's the best thing in the world for contusions and sprains, and anything of that

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sort. I'm afraid, dear, that if you are so stiff and sore, you will not be equal to much dancing to-night. "

"Dancing! " repeat I, pricking up my ears, as a horse does, when in the distance he hears the horn and the hounds giving tongue.

"Haven't you heard of it? " says Lady Capel, "why, we have all been on the qui vive all day about it; we have been making decorations, and hanging up flags and standing on step-ladders ever since breakfast, haven't we? "

My thoughts revert to my one ball, and Captain Dashwood, who has become a very hazy mist figure of late. He was a 'heavy' too. I seem fated to be the prey of the Cavalry.

"We are not very dancing people generally, " Lady Lancaster says in her stately slow way, "it is many years since there was a ball in this house; it was quite a sudden thought, but my son thought perhaps it would amuse the young people. "

"How very kind of him, " I say very gratefully, while my eyes begin to shine like carriage lamps.

"It is quite a small affair! only nine or ten couples, but everybody is in town. "

Lady Capel sighs. Fain, fain would she be there too, but the Newmarket Stud, and a long course of point-lace bonnets have necessitated the letting of the Capellian mansion in Park Lane this season.

"Small impromptu dances are always the pleasantest, " she says politely, "the only thing is that in the country gentlemen are not to be had for love or money. "

"It is indeed very true! " says Lady Lancaster, shaking her head, and her marabout feathers with it, as solemnly as if it had been question of the famine in India. "The young men of the present day cannot be content to stay at home and look after their properties; they must be running about to Egypt and Palestine, and half a dozen other places that they never thought of in my younger days, " (very likely not, for it took eighteen months to get to India in her younger days.) "I

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consider that it's quite one of the greatest evils of this generation; one of the signs of the latter days! "

"A very unpleasant sign! " think I, if it is to entail a Spurgeonic dance on me this evening. Lady Capel sees my countenance falling.

"You need not be afraid of lacking partners, " she says, nodding to me; "for I heard Sir Hugh saying that he had invited a number of the Scots Greys over from Nantford. "

"My son is a host in himself, " says Lady Lancaster; "he is a very energetic dancer! "

There is nothing, from the writing a book on the Differential Calculus to making cabbage nets, that 'my son' cannot do in his mother's opinion.

"How many are we in the house? " says Miss Gifford counting. "Sir Hugh, one, Lord Capel, two. Does he dance, Lady Capel? "

"When he is wanted; he does not think it fair to stand in the young men's light! "

The dressing bell rings.

"Dear me! I had no idea that it was so late! "

"We dine at seven to-day, " says Lady Lancaster, explanatorily, and then we all separate to make ourselves beautiful for the Scots Greys.

CHAPTER III.

WE are to dance in the dining room; the hall has a stone floor, and Lady Lancaster objects to the dismantling of any of the other rooms; consequently we are to dine in the hall. Lady Lancaster makes many apologies to us; hopes we don't mind, but we must be prepared to rough it a little, which means that we are to eat a first rate Russian dinner, and drink unexceptionable wines half an hour earlier than usual, and in a different but equally comfortable room to that in which we usually feast.

Blessed! for ever blessed! be the manner and custom which compels the host to take the woman of highest rank into dinner. In no company more exalted than that to be found in an almshouse, or a charity school, am I likely to be the woman of highest rank, so, for once, I escape Hugh. Though he manoeuvres to have me on his other side, I counter-manoeuve and more successfully to avoid him. Fate assigns me the young gentleman with the death's head studs, Mr. De Laney an artless child who helps to make the British Grenadier, "The terror of the Umbrian, The terror of the Gaul, " and who prattles away to me about Windsor and Canada, and muffins, and skating on the Rink, and shooting Cariboo. Dick is on the same side of the table, further down. By leaning back in my chair, and peeping behind my guardsman, the widow, the sceptic, and Miss Gifford, I catch a glimpse of a broadcloth back, and a yellow love lock or two; he has been dipping his head in cold water, apparently, for it is curling more furiously than ever. But neither a man's back-hair nor his back afford much insight into the state of his temper and feelings. I certainly neither lived to eat, nor ate to live that day; great excitement is utterly exclusive of hunger.

"No, thanks! no, thanks! no, thanks! " say I again and again, as gorgeous gentlemen in plush and calves, poke fish and flesh, and fowl, in every appetizing disguise under my nose.

"Are you a Catholic, Miss Lestrangle? " asks my little boy at last. He is not a bad little boy; cheery and equally ready for a Fenian invasion, and a valse with a pretty girl.

"No; why? " ask I, opening my big eyes.

"Because it seems to be a Fast Day with you, and it is Wednesday, so I thought you must be a Holy Roman."

I laugh a little.

"No; only I'm not hungry."

"I'm afraid you are seedy."

"No, I am not."

"Dancing is very hard work; one requires a great deal of support to stand it at all!" with a grin on his jolly wide mouth, and he acts as if he believed what he said. Not even our brave defenders can eat for ever, however; about ten o'clock we are most of us gathered in the drawing-room. The men are struggling into their gloves; one, who pretends that he takes ladies' size, has burst one pair, and is on the eve of bursting a second; two or three of the youngest and conceitedest have retired to endue fresh ties.

Carriages are beginning to be heard; the Coxes are the first to arrive. Horses next door to thorough-bred, that must not be kept standing one second; a coat of arms as big as a dinner plate on each panel; cockaded servants, (for Mr. Coxe is a volunteer, and inexpressibly laughable the podgy little millionaire looks going through the goose-step, and shouldering arms, in his invisible green uniform;) this is the way in which the British tradesman visits his friends in these happy days.

Mr. and Mrs. Coxe make their entry arm-in-arm, and as they are both fat kine, they have some difficulty in getting through the door. Mr. Coxe has on that crimson velvet waistcoat, from which not all the prayers, tears, and entreaties of his wife and daughters can avail to divorce him.

Behind the parent birds come the pullets and cockerel; Mortimer Spencer De Lacy Coxe, Gentleman Commoner at Oxford, with his name down for Boodle's, the "Junior Conservative," and half a dozen other crack Clubs, but of the shop, shoppy, with his sister Amaryllis and the rear brought up by Lily, who has the highest colour, and Violet, who has the loudest voice in A—shire. Lady Lancaster in her pearl-gray satin—Mrs. Coxe's pink moire-antique cost just as much a yard, but it has not the same imposing effect, —

risers and says very majestically, "How do you do, Mrs. Coxe? " It is the first time that the Coxes' have been within the doors of Wentworth, and I think for a minute or two they wish themselves well out of them again.

Despite my distaste for old women, I cannot help admiring the old lady. She is like an old queen receiving a deputation from some of her faithful burgesses. She is a tiresome old woman, and teases one's life out about the Zulu Indians and the Millenium and "my son, " but she is a lady to the backbone. Coxes may buy up the old houses and the poor old lands, and almost the old pedigrees, but they cannot buy the 'grand air. ' Hugh has not got the grand air, but he has a very good-natured air, which has more the knack of making people feel comfortable than his mother's grand one.

"Dye do, Miss Coxe? very glad to see you! Dye do Miss Lily? I hope you feel equal to a great deal of exercise to-night, for we don't intend to let you go home till this time to-morrow. " Then the Scots Greys arrive in their drag; half-a-dozen of them come herding into the room, knowing no one, and hanging together like a swarm of bees.

Hugh takes them up, and presents them to his parent, who shakes hands with the Colonel, and executes a magnificent reverence to the others, which reverence frightens one cornet of a timid disposition and tender years nearly into fits.

Then the arrivals come thick and fast; people who do not go to town at all; and people whose purses are only equal to a month or six weeks at the height of the season, and who, consequently, have not taken flight yet. Papa and mamma, boys and girls, here they all are.

About half-past ten, Sir Hugh gives Lady Capel his arm, and leads her to the dancing room; each man chooses the woman he loves, or the woman to whom he has just been introduced, or the woman whose father has asked him to dinner, and we all troop after them.

I don't wish to see a more cheery scene than the Wentworth dining-room—transmogrified with pink calico and union jacks, and wreaths of evergreens and flowers, till it hardly knows itself—presented that evening, just before the dancing commenced, when the waxlights—becomingest of lights—were all lit and blazing softly, mellowly, from their sconces along the walls where dresses were rustling gently, and there was a buzz of talking; when the hook-nosed chaperones, (why,

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I wonder, do the noses of most British matrons at a certain period become hooks?) in their many coloured silks and satins were settling down on their benches, like a flock of brilliant but venerable tropical birds, contented with the prospect of an evening of vicarious enjoyment, and looking forward with trusting faith to the supper hour; when all the girls, with one or two hopeless exceptions, were looking pretty, and when the fiddlers were tuning up and causing their instruments to emit queer little squeaks, discordant prelude to a harmonious after-piece. My faithful Grenadier boy has bidden me for the first dance, which turns out to be a quadrille, rather to his disgust.

"I did not mean to ask you for one of those stupid square things!" he says, "it's the worse compliment you can pay a woman to ask her for a quadrille!"

"For the last quadrille," I say laughing. "You have not done that at all events!"

Sir Hugh has been rushing about wildly, saying a civil thing to each of the old women, and making good-humoured jokes to a percentage of the girls; now he comes up to me, where I sit on a scarlet bench alone.

"You are engaged for this next valse, of course?"

"Yes."

"Is not it anybody that you can cut?"

"Oh, no! no!"

"Give me the next then, won't you? we have made it up, haven't we?"

"I did not know that we had ever quarreled!"

"All right then; mind you keep it for me."

He writes his name on my card, as men always do write on these occasions, so that no human being could decipher it, and then rushes back to his duties. I told Sir Hugh a fib; I am not engaged for the next dance. Several people have asked me for it, but I have told the same

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fib to them all; I am keeping it for one who does not seem inclined to come and claim it. There is a little pause between the two dances; a little lull between two pleasant storms; people seem to be shaking up together very comfortably. The strange warriors have made acquaintance with some of the native women, and are exchanging beads and looking-glasses.

The Miss Coxes are in great request; Miss Violet—such a jolly girl! it does not in the least matter what you say to her—is holding a little court near the door, well away from Lady Lancaster; her bon mots do not reach me, but the applause that follows them does. Close to me, the young man with the catarrh is coughing noisily; his cold has taken a new turn; he can pronounce his M's and N's, but he has purchased that power at the expense of as roaring a cough, as the poor lady's in the epitaph.

"If you would but try jujubes, " I hear Miss Seymour saying, with feeling.

"No good at all! " replies the sufferer, huskily. "I've eaten a box and a half already. "

He seems very sorry indeed for himself as men always do, if they have a fingerache.

"Go to bye-bye, my dear fellow, I advise! " says little De Laney heartlessly; "put your feet in gruel and drink hot water, and you'll be all serene to-morrow morning. "

The invalid looks cross, and mutters something about it's being all very fine.

"Not fine at all! if you intend going on barking that way all the evening, for you'll drown the band, " and then he goes off laughing.

"I'm afraid you'll think me a very fidgetty old woman, " says Lady Lancaster to a young matron, who has inadvertently placed herself near an open window, "but aren't you a little imprudent to be sitting in such a thorough draught? nothing so likely to give cold; we old people have learnt by bitter experience you know, particularly when décolleté too—"

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I hear no more, for the band clashes out; big fiddle and little fiddle, harp and bones, off they go. There is a movement among the company; non-dancers clearing out of the way, men looking for their partners.

My heart begins to beat so fast, that I feel choking. "Perhaps he cannot see me where I am sitting. " I stand up, and push gently forwards into the front of the circle forming round the dancers, while my legs tremble under me.

The ice is broken; one adventurous couple has set off on their course of insane gyrations, quickly followed by another and another, till the whole room is filled with whirling clouds of tulle and tarletan, enveloped in which, manly legs vanish to re-appear meteor-like for an instant and then be swallowed up more completely than before. I dig my fingers into my poor bruised arm, and don't feel the pain I am inflicting on myself one bit. "Won't he come? won't he come? Oh, how cruel he is! " Suddenly an opening is made in the spectators, to admit a fresh couple, such a handsome couple.

"Hallo! how's this? " cries Hugh, coming up behind, "has your partner forgotten you? "

"I—I believe so, " with my lips trembling.

"Never mind, there's as good fish in the sea, as ever came out of it; you'll have to put up with me, after all. "

"Oh, no! no! " I cry, turning my shoulder to him; "I don't want, please not. "

Sir Hugh is rather obtuse.

"You a wallflower of all people! couldn't think of such a thing. "

I have not spirit to resist further, nor can I trust my voice, so we join the whirl, and whirl too. Hugh dances well; does it with all his heart, and mind, and soul, and strength, as he does everything he puts his hand to—the great secret of his happy cheery life is that he never does anything by halves. I get giddy at last, so we stop and watch our neighbours spinning away like so many peg tops, to the sound of "Il Bacio. "

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Some dance in time; some dance out; some dance hoppily, like parched peas; some dance smoothly; some go jog trotting along, like old cart horses to market; some go racing pace. Amaryllis Coxe and a long gawky, all arms and legs, come floundering into us.

"Oh, I beg your pardon; I hope I did no harm. " Then lumber off again; hobble-de-gee, hobble-de-gee. Another couple passes us; racers these; and I bite my lip till it bleeds, as I look after them. Dolly in maize tulle, and pomegranates in her hair; smooth cheeks like living rose leaves; her scarlet lips half apart, is floating down the long room, lying restfully in Dick's arms, with her head on his shoulder. Dolly has a most reprehensible style of dancing; I think though Dick does not seem to think so, as they swim fleetly round, with the most complete agreement in their supple movements. Dolly is the sort of woman, upon whom Mr. Algernon Swinburne would write pages of magnificent uncleanness.

"Where were we this time last night, eh? " roars Hugh sentimentally, for we are close to the recess where the band is placed,

"I'm rested! " I say, abruptly; I cannot stand any tender reminiscences. So that dance ends, and another and another follow quickly.

The patient chaperones sit biding their time, like a row of old hens, roosting in a hen house, with here and there a super-annuated chanticleer crowing feebly to enliven them. A knot of men hang about the door, talking horsily and doggily, and fling out a careless word of commendation in the equine tongue, as some filly, more promising than ordinary flies by, wafting twenty yards of tulle against their faces.

"Why aren't you taking a more active part in these gay doings? " asks the naughty old gentleman, who is known amongst men by the name of Sir Phillip Leroy to the widowed Mrs. Marryat, who has effected an ingenious compromise between the memory of the enskied one, and the desire not to let grief be too disfiguring in the eyes of his successor in posse, by a judicious combination of the funeral black and the bridal white in her attire.

"I! Oh, no! no! " with a glance at her black dress, and a sigh.

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"Perhaps, " (letting himself gently down on the bench beside her,)
"perhaps you object to the pleasant knocking down of old-fashioned barriers in the present style of dancing; it certainly is what would have been called in our younger days, —(How to write a whisper), don't you think so? "

"Take care! take care! somebody will hear you. "

I have been guiding heavy youths who would give their left hand, when they ought to give their right, and their right hand when they ought to give their left through the labyrinth of the Lancers, and the mazes of the gay quadrille. Men seem to like fern wreaths, and red heads, and ignorance. It is quite a new light to myself that I am a beauty, but I am so fortunate as to overhear that the bay filly is considered quite one of the best things out. I have been scampering round the room with almost every man in it, with one melancholy exception.

Dick has been scampering largely too; with the three Miss Coxes of course; a quadrille with Mrs. Coxe—who makes her steps and chassé's, as the world chasséd in the days when she was Miss Martha Harris—with Miss Gifford, Miss Seymour and half a dozen other Misses; then again with Dolly.

"I so seldom meet anyone whose step suits mine; it is such a treat! " I hear Dolly saying very softly, while she looks at him as I fancy Dalilah looked at Samson, when she tried to wile the secret of his strength from him. Dolly reminds me of "—The maid of Cassivelaun, Whom Gwydion made by glamour out of flowers. "
"Sandy! The canny Scott! Daddy Longlegs! " say I to myself indignantly, recalling all the ignominious epithets that she had heaped on the man, at whom she is now looking with the eyes of a hundred 'Laises' rolled into one. Oh, if I could but tell him! How I wish that she had had the small-pox in her youth; she might have been a good, worthy, useful woman then; making flannel waistcoats for poor people; wheeling the old dad's chair to the fire for him, and being my confidant.

The room is getting so hot; too much of a good thing is as undesirable as a little of a bad one; the smell of the gilly-flowers and roses is getting past a joke; it makes one's head ache and one almost wishes to exchange it for a little bonedust or guano. Some one—a young person—opens a window, and some one—an old person,

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Lady Lancaster, I think it is—shuts it again. Lady Lancaster has that rooted aversion to fresh air, which characterized the last generation.

The girls fan themselves vigorously, and the men mop their foreheads, and a whisper goes through the room that the door of the supper-room is open. Unhappy Patres Conscripti who have been dragged hither at their wives 'chariot wheels,' begin to console themselves with the reflection that their sufferings are at all events half over.

"Come, Capel, you lazy beggar!" says Sir Hugh coming up, and tapping that ornament to the Peerage on the back; "why don't you make yourself of some use? take one of those old girls down to supper with you; oh, yes, there is Mrs. Cox; take her; won't she 'my lord' you!"

"What, that female Daniel Lambert! No, no, my good fellow; it makes one hot to look at her; and I'm 92 in the shade, as it is!"

However, he obeys, and others go and do likewise. Dowager after dowager sweeps by to receive the reward of her faith. The musicians retire to refresh themselves, and I need hardly say that the man who plays the bones gets drunk.

"Been to supper?" asks Hugh, who is conveying one of the first detachment back again.

I have freed myself from all my admirers, and am sitting in a humped-up, disconsolate attitude like a fowl on a wet day.

"No, I don't want any!" looking down uneasily, and plucking at the wooden bracelet that adorns my left wrist.

"Oh, nonsense! we must have half a dozen more spins by-and-bye. I have got through all my duty dances, and you'll never be up to them without lots of champagne; we mustn't let her starve herself, must we, mother?"

Mother waggles her old head, while the family diamonds (even they don't render me unfaithful to Dick) make a restless light on her withered neck, and says "No, indeed!" she is always an advocate for a good deal of nourishment for young people.

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For the second time, I am vanquished, and am walked off to the supper room, where I find my fellow creatures like cattle before rain— "Forty feeding like one; " and where I am compelled to swallow chicken and tongue that sticks in my throat, and champagne that is of all drinks the one most abhorrent to me. The evening wears on, with no improvement in my circumstances.

I get so weary at last of the everlasting 'tum te tum! tum te tum! ' The room is getting strewn with long strips and fragments of gauze and tulle; and the garlands flag and droop. The girls' hair is getting loosened, and their complexions red and flushed; all the freshness is gone from their faces and their toilettes; there is something of the Bacchante, I always think, in the look of a woman at the end of a hard fought ball; the men wear better, but they look rather limp too, and inclined like La Motte Fouqué's "Ondine" to melt away into running brooks.

"That's in honour of me! " says little De Laney, as the "Guards' Waltz" peals out, and we prepare to embark on it, "a very pretty compliment of Lancaster's isn't it? "

"You are like the man that got up and bowed, when the people cheered the king as he came into the theatre, " I say laughing, for there is something contagious about light-heartedness.

"Who's the girl in the blue top knot; one would have to have a piece added on to one's arm, before one could hope to get round her waist. "

"Miss Coxe. "

"Any relation to the Army Agent, because if so, I would ask her to put in a good word for me with her papa. "

"I don't know, I'm sure. "

"One struggle more and she'll be free, whoever she is. "

Amaryllis is candour and generosity's self in the display of her anatomy. One faint gleam of hope comes to me that evening; but it is like the little yellow glimmer of light that comes out on a hillside in wintry weather, no sooner seen than swallowed up again in the dull murkiness. I am dancing a quadrille, With that everlasting, excellent,

intolerable Hugh, and Dick, very much against his will, is my vis-à-vis. We meet in the dance; "What on earth have I done?" I say, with tears in my voice, and throwing all my eager soul into my misty blue eyes, as I look up in his dear sulky patrician face. He glances down at me doubtfully, half inclined to be modified.

"Now, Miss Nelly! now, Miss Nelly!" (how enraging to be called 'Miss Nelly') "what are you thinking about? we ought to have been half through this figure by now!" cries Sir Hugh catching hold of my hand, and the opportunity that looked so promising is lost. It is a mistake to suppose that it is the wicked that make this world such a sad and weary place, it is the good, blundering dunderheads! "How our wishes do mock us!" I think to myself, as I follow Lady Lancaster and her sleepy covey up the broad shallow staircase to bed. "I should have thought that to meet Dick at a ball was the acme of human happiness, and now—"

I wake next morning, stiff as a doll that refuses to bend anywhere but in the middle, and with great difficulty there; with my head feeling like a ton of lead, and my eyes swelled to the size of well grown walnuts.

"What an object!" cries Dolly, lifting up her slim hands, as she comes into my room, in an innocent-looking white peignoir, looking as fresh as a daisy. "Rachel weeping for her children! Charlotte at the tomb of Werther! Agrippina over the urn of somebody! I thought how it would be, so I came to see."

"You'll—you'll be the death of me, Dolly," I say whimpering, "and—and then you'll be sorry!"

"The jury will bring it in *felo de se*, I think!" says Dolly, tripping daintily across to the window, and pulling up the blinds, the better to examine into the condition of my countenance. "Good heavens, child! you are worse than I thought; not all the Eau de Cologne, and rouge and pearl powder in England could make you presentable; you would defy Madame Rachel; you must not attempt to go downstairs."

"I don't mean to!" I say sobbing, "you shall have it all your own way; go and tell him some more lies about me, and I'll st—st—stay up here, and—and die!"

CHAPTER IV.

I WENT dinnerless that day at Wentworth—a thing that even in deepest grief one is seldom willing to do—dinnerless, unless the cud of sour and bitter thoughts which I chewed might pass for the festive meal that forms the nucleus of day's dearest interests in most people's lives. Nor did I appear at all till the evening was well on towards ten o'clock. If I had listened to the voice of nature, I should not have appeared at all, but should have retired straightway to bed, and paid the consideration that was due to it, to my most painful occiput. But then we were to leave Wentworth next day, and I could not afford to lose my last chance of reconciliation with Dick.

At all risks, at the risk of my head splitting in two, I must go down to keep a watch upon the wily Dorothea's movements. So I rose, and bathed my cheeks with fresh water, whereby they became and remained as red as the new pulpit cushions in Lestrange Church; I twisted up my hair, and crowned it with a bush of ivy, put on a white frock, girded myself with a rosy sash, and went down.

I stole into the bilious drawing-room, in a mouse-like manner, in the wake of a brace of giant footmen, bearing tea, nor did any one perceive my modest entry. Three-fourths of the party were, I found, tightly packed round a table, employed in one of the senselessest modes of wasting time, that man (ingenious in frittering away his little day) has ever invented—a round game.

Every one was speaking at the utmost pitch of their voices, and laughing with all the force of their lungs. Some were squabbling over counters, some were making oeiliades behind clubs and spades and diamonds, some were facetiously trying to cheat, and others were getting cross with them for so trying.

Every man spoke, and no man listened. Surely, surely, ombre and quadrille and brag must have been delectabler games than their posterity, commerce and chow-chow, or they never could have seduced the Lady Betty Modishes, Lady Bridgets, and Lady Annes, into keeping such rakish hours, and indulging such naughty passions for their sakes, as we are led by the "Spectator" to suppose they did.

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"Sympathy, or antipathy? " says Sir Hugh, in his stentor's voice, interrogatively, to the sharp young lady beside him.

"Oh, antipathy! " she answers venomously, "I always say antipathy; it pays much the best, I find. "

"I like sympathy best; don't you? " sighs Miss Seymour, to a very Anglican young divine, who is beaming over his barnacles, pastorally at her, and her lean collar bones.

"Six upon sympathy! "

"Six upon antipathy! "

"Six upon sympathy! "

"You owe me thirty-six. "

"How do you make that out? "

"Have 'rouge et noir, ' Sir Hugh! "

"Do! it's such fun. "

"No, no, have blind hookey! "

"No, pips! "

"Take my advice, Lancaster, don't have pips! dealer always loses. "

Such, and many similar ejaculations, uttered simultaneously, in keys, varying from forte to fortissimo, assail my mazed ears. Dick is not among them, Dolly is; Miss Lestrangle is off guard; she is a little out of her reckoning, and is enjoying a false security, under the impression that I am tossing in anguish on a bed of pain up-stairs, out of the way of handsome paupers.

She is no longer the shrewd, worldly-wise woman of two hours ago, whose sentiments might have been those of a French Marquise of fifty, temp. Louis Quinze, could hardly have belonged to any one younger or less world-polluted. She is transformed into the innocentest, child- ishest Marguerite; one could well fancy her

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picking the daisy petals to pieces, to find out whether her lover loved her un peu, passionément, or point de tout.

The guiltless author of this metamorphosis was a very young cotton lord, with a fleshy nose, and a retreating chin, who was willing enough to be Faust; willing, though not eager, because no young gentleman that is a real young gentleman, ever is eager about anything now-a-days.

Dolly's whole infantine soul was immersed in her miniature speculations; her soft cheeks were flushing shyly, and the full pink lips, and the velvet eyes, were saying, with a triumph of simplicity, "I should like always to be your partner, you bring me such good luck. " The old game! the old game! it wearies me! But where is Richard? Is he dead, or gone to bed? My eyes roam over the yellow sea, but fail to descry him; then I bethink me of the folding-doors, and the adjoining saloon.

Is that—can it be the top of a human head appearing above the back of an arm- chair, in the dim distance? It is worth investigating. I investigate. The head is Dick's. Dick lying back, holding a book topsy turvy in his hand, and looking as bored and as sulky as any one of Her Majesty's servants need look.

"I came to look for you—Dick! " I say in a small meek voice, diffidently.

"Indeed! Very good of you, I'm sure! " rising ceremoniously, and trying very hard, but vainly, to be ironical. One must either be, or appear to be, in a good temper, to be successfully ironical.

"I thought I'd come and try to make friends, " say I conciliatorily.

"Have you asked Sir Hugh's leave? " says he, acrimoniously.

"What do you mean? "

"What I say. "

We stand and glare irefully at one another. I cool first. "Oh dear, oh dear! how soon Dolly has turned you against me, poor me! " I cry plaintively.

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"You never were more mistaken in your life; on the contrary, Dol—, your sister, I mean—tried her best to make excuses for you; said you were young and changeable, and foolish! "

Who likes being called foolish? none of us mind being called wicked; we take it rather civilly than otherwise; but who does not resent the imputation of folly? "Young and foolish, am I? " I cry, at white heat; "and what is she, pray? Would you like to know? Shall I tell you: she's a mean liar, that's what she is, there? "

Dick gnaws his moustache savagely; my nervous English displeases him. "Calling names is very easy, " he says, angrily, "blackening another person to whitewash yourself; it's not quite so easy proving your assertions. "

I come quite close to him, in my eagerness, and lay a hot white hand on his coat sleeve.

"Is not a liar a person that tells lies? " I ask.

"Of course. "

"Well, did not she tell a lie, a villainous black lie, when she told you the day before yesterday that I wanted Hugh to drive me? Don't I hate Hugh? don't I think him the dullest, tiresomest, botheringest, gray-headedest old fogey that ever existed? She knows I do, and you know I do, only you're b—b—bent on br—breaking my heart. "

So I finish with symptoms of imminent whimpering. Exeunt sulks and scowls from my lover's face.

"Is that true, Nell? "

"True! to be sure it is! Am I a liar, like Dolly? "

"On your honour? "

"On my honour. "

"On your soul? "

"On my soul. "

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"You did not want to drive with him? You are sure. "

"Not I, indeed! I was in such a rage that I would hardly speak to him all the way to Wilton, only he is such a dunderhead that I don't think he perceived it; how you ever could have believed such a transparent falsehood, passes my comprehension. "

The gray eyes look rather ashamed of themselves, but very much pleased all the same.

"Was not it natural I should think you'd prefer a rich beggar like him to a poor devil, who has not got two halfpennies to rub together, like me? "

"Does one value one's friends in proportion to the depth of their money bags? If one did, I should have but a poor opinion of myself and my dear old father, " I say gravely.

There comes a fresh burst of maniac mirth from the votaries of chow-chow.

"He's cheating; he's cheating! " "Will you sell your deal? " "I'll give you half-a-crown for it. " "Three shillings. " "Twelve and ten is twenty-two, I'm up! " "No thanks; I'll stand! " &c., &c.

"Come into the verandah, Nell, " says Dick, taking my most willing fingers in his; "we cannot hear each other's voices for this Babel, can we? "

We pass into the verandah upon which the salon "gives, " to use an Anglicised Gallicism. Roses, red and white; roses, full-blown and over-blown and budding; ruga, with her old-fashioned scented clusters, and her redder sisters, climb and clamber up the wooden trellis work; clematis weaves her tendrils in amongst them, and jessamine stars stud the deep green of ivy leaves. And through creepers and trellis work the moon looks down, benignant and gracious, and large and full, turning the night into a mellow softened feminine day.

She fell full on a beautiful passionate face (not mine, I don't mean), and on a form such as one may fancy those were that wrestled in blue and green on the bloody sand of the arena, before the pitiless Roman world, when (the cruel thumbs being turned down) many a

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gladiatorial Hercules bit the dust. Good God! how happy I was, lying in his arms, and with the top of my tall wreath scratching his handsome nose.

"I'm a jealous idiot, aren't I, pretty one? " he asks, raining kisses on my lips, thick as leaves in autumn, or the whirling Simois.

"Yes, Dick, I think so. "

"You'll never think the same of me again, of course? "

"Oh, no, never! " (shaking my head with solemnity).

"But still, bad as I am, you like me a little bit better than Lancaster? "

"I should like you very little indeed, else. "

"You little foolish girl! think of preferring me with twopence a year to him with a fine house, and a handle to his name. "

"That's just what Dolly says; as you both say the same thing, there must be some truth in it; but it's never too late to mend, is it? The big house and the handle are still within reach, you know; will you come and see me when I'm Lady Lancaster? "

"No, I'm d—d if I will! "

I see the gray eyes flash in the moonlight at the bare idea of that visit.

"Nelly Lancaster! Eleanor Lancaster! how pretty it sounds! " I cry, pensively, plucking a moon washed rose, and sniffing at it.

"Nelly Lestrangle is prettier, and Nelly M'Gregor is prettiest of all, isn't it, darling? " asks Dick, gathering me closer than ever to himself.

"What love is in the moon's eternal eyes
Leaning unto the earth from out the blissful skies. "

Did she look with love at us two poor fools, who, spendthrift-like, were devouring our whole portion of bliss in one half hour; that portion, which, spread in a thin layer, over long years, ought to have afforded us a decent competence during our lives. Silent we stood

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there, passion-drunk; did we remember then, in our perfect wonderful satisfaction, who it was that has said "this is not your rest? " The night wind sighs past; it is bearing, perhaps, some weary soul to the land that is very far off, it rocks the heavy-folded roses, and whispers to us some vague sweet tale that we heed not.

"Oh, Dick! " I murmur, "I wish to God I could die now. I shall never, never be so happy again! "

Dick shudders through his strong young frame.

"Don't talk of dying, my darling! Your life is only just begun, you poor little child! "

"M'Gregor! M'Gregor! where are you? " sounds the stentor's voice of our worthy host, breaking prosaically on our touching dialogue at this point. "Where the devil is the fellow gone? "

"The fellow" makes no sign; he lies as quiet as a partridge between two turnip ridges. Then a dark head and a body issue from the saloon, and step through the French windows, on to the verandah.

"Oh, you're here, are you? " in a voice of anything but gratification at the discovery.

"Yes, my good fellow, you made such a row over your game, all of you, that we had to come out here for a little peace and quietness—hadn't we? " turning to me, with softened voice, and eyes fondly possessive. I say "yes, " and mumble something, in an indistinct manner, about its being late, and going to bed, and—headache, and shuffle off, very red in the face, leaving my two lovers to decide their rival claims to the possession of my person, by single combat, by lots, or by heads and tails, whichever they chose.

CHAPTER V.

WHY do I tell my poor little story so circumstantially, I wonder? Will any one care to read it? Is a dissected heart worth looking at, even though it be rather a foolish one? They say that love is the recognizing something of oneself in another person. Will any one, I wonder, recognise in me some of their own foolish fancies and thoughts and notions, and love me for being as silly as themselves, and for owning to them that I am? The old yellow-bodied barouche, and the two victims to spavin and spring-halt, are slowly creeping up "the long back" of a hill; the old coachman is flicking spavin's fat flanks gently with his whip, which that worthy beast does not mind a bit. The sunlight lies patchily on the dusty road; here and there a big tree intercepts it, and holds it in his great branches; a little white-haired child stands at a cottage door eating bread and treacle, and clapping his little brown hands at the horses; bees are buzzing drowsily about straw hives; "wine-dark" auriculas are blowing in the little borders; a woman is feeding a pig. We are going home; Wentworth lies three miles behind us, and I am thinking of the past, and smiling.

How plainly I see that group gathered on the stone steps to bid us God-speed. Lady Lancaster, in a brown silk so stiff and thick that it could well stand by itself, without the support of her ladyship's body inside it, leaning forward to give me a motherly salute (her beard meanwhile pricking me rather), while she says, in her prim old woman's voice—

"I hope we shall see you very often my dear, now!"

Dolly, with one foot on the carriage step, giving a small, smooth lavender hand to Sir Hugh, and saying good-bye to him so softly, as if she was so sorry to part from him; Dick, leaning one great shoulder against the door-post, and smiling a tender, flickering smile under his heavy moustache, and all around a great glory of sunshine, and young green leaves, and blue summer sky. Dick is going to Cork to-day, to join his regiment (happy, happy Cork!) but he is going to write to me, and I am to write to him; is not this brick and mortar enough to build quite a big Spanish castle with? I am so building now as we jog along in the sleepy sunshine.

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"My darling! my darling! " I am saying to myself over and over again, like the refrain to a song; "how I love you! " My hands are clasped together in my green cotton cap, and my eyes are looking up to the grand blue dome above, in a great rapture and gratitude and joy. Was it his beauty I loved him for? Should I have loved him so much if he had been little and black and ugly? If his comely looks were to go away from him now, would my love go away too? No, no, no! If he were to lose arms and legs, and eyes and nose and ears, he would still be my Dick, my beautiful, strong King Olaf.

In my mind I was drawing a little picture—a little picture with two figures and a dingy back-ground. A bare barrack-room (barrack-rooms were always bare, I imagined, and of course we should not be able to afford lodgings) with no curtain, perhaps, and a bit of drugget in the middle of the floor, and a green baize table-cloth. A good fire though there was in the picture, and an elbow chair beside it; Dick in the elbow chair in full regimentals (I had an adoration equal to any boarding-school-miss's for "The pomp and circumstance of glorious war"), and I, on a low stool at his feet, with my arms resting on his knees, looking up alternately at his face and his medals—my hero had three of those insignia—and making little tender speeches to him—speeches that I never hitherto had summoned resolution to utter.

When by myself I was eloquent enough, eloquent as Ulysses or Burke, but when with him the passion of his eyes struck me dumb. It would be different when we were married. I should then be able to speak to him without that shy thrill; should be able to tell him what he was to me; to find words to syllable my great pure love.

Then the scene shifted. Dick was ousted from among the dramatis personæ; I reigned in the elbow chair instead; I, dressed simply yet elegantly, holding a levée of officers of every grade and standing in Her Majesty's army; colonels, majors, and captains clustering in reverent admiration around me.

With what modest dignity should I comport myself in my difficult position; with what simple yet spirited answers should I parry their complimentary remarks.

Married at nineteen! How interesting, and like a story-book! Mrs. M'Gregor! Nelly M'Gregor! Major and Mrs. M'Gregor! I would write

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it down in my blotting book as soon as I got home, to see how it looked.

I suppose my lips moved visibly as I articulated my own and husband's names softly under my breath, for Dolly, who had not uttered a word before since we left Wentworth, now turned to me—Dolly in a neutral-tinted gauzy bonnet, with one blood-red carnation resting on and contrasting her shiny sombre hair; thus she spoke in her harmoniously round, full tones—

"Are you engaged in prayer? "

"No; " said I, rather cross at being roused from my reverie; "why on earth should I be? "

"Your lips were moving, so I thought you might be breathing a short prayer, as people do in the 'Sunday at Home, ' you know—for me, perhaps. "

"No, I wasn't, " said I; "I was talking to myself, which is much pleasanter than praying; at least I find it so. " (Merciful God! I don't think so now!)

I turned my head away, and watched the cloud-shadows travelling swiftly over the green wheat fields, turning their laughing golden green into dull blue green as they passed; at the blackbirds gobbling cherries in the farm orchards we were driving by.

"Is it thinking of its lover? " pursued the angel in the gauzy bonnet.

"Yes, " said I, briefly, "I am. "

I would not stand any impudence from Dolly any longer, I was resolved. I should soon be a married woman, and able to patronize spinsters all and sundry.

"So it has got its big wax doll after all, has it? " asks she, with a sneer, "curly wig and long legs, and all! "

I am roused to retort. I turn and rend her.

"Sour grapes! " cry I, with red cheeks, and in an elevated key; "don't you wish we could say—

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"Miss Jenny and Polly
Had each a new Dolly? "

Dolly smiled sweetly, but her long sleepy eyes gave one little flash.

"Yes, dear, I do, " she said with candour, "only I don't think I should care about playing dolls in a workhouse, which I fear will be your portion. "

"I believe you would sell your soul for gold, " said I, with my nose in the air, in lofty disdain.

"I certainly would, " answered my sister, sedately; "one's soul does not do one much good that I could ever find out; if I could have my body left me, my nice, pretty, pleasant body, with plenty of money to keep it well fed and well dressed, I'd give my soul its congé with the greatest sang froid imaginable. "

I felt feebly shocked at Dolly's sentiments, but too lazily and sovereignly indifferent to what she or her soul said or did to contest the point with her, so we relapsed into silence, and preserved a sort of armed truce, till we reached the rook-haunted old house blinking sleepily from its ivy mantle amid its sunny crofts, with the gray-blue smoke curling straight up into the air from the queer old chimney-stacks.

The library windows at Lestrange look out on the gravelled sweep before the door; small-paned, casemented windows they are; and as we passed them I leaned forwards eagerly, to blow kisses at my father, whose face I saw leaning out among the roses and the bowery clematis to greet us. What a sad old face it was! What a yellowing tinge—like a sere November leaf's tinge, that spake of waning life and waxing sickness—was stealing over it. Poor noble old face! how often I see you now in my dreams, looking out from among the fresh pink rose-bunches! I ran to my sire with 'effusion, ' and hurled my substantial young person into his arms; he bore the charge with equanimity.

"Well, little lass! " he said, with his sorrowful smile, sorrowfuller than any tears, "have you seen a great many fine people, and got a fine new lover, and are you very sorry to come back to the dull old house and the dull old man? "

"Of course I am," said I, with a fresh series of ursine hugs; "I should not have come back at all if it had not been that I knew the Cochin cock was to be killed to-morrow, and I thought I must come back and bid him good-bye, poor dear fowl, before he died. Come, dad," I continued, coaxingly, thrusting my arm through his in its threadbare gray coat-sleeve, and dragging him to the door, "let us come and see the pigs and the chickens, and I'll tell you all about it."

So we went, my daddy and I—went, and found the doomed chanticleer scratching and scraping peaceably on the dunghill, advertising the treasures he found there, now and again, to his harem, by one lordly cluck. The pigs and we exchanged civilities, and then I began, and narrated all things in order to my parent; how we had gone a pic-nicing, and how I had been upset out of a dogcart, and how I had fainted, and how funny it felt, and how disagreeable it was spending all the night in that little pot-house, reading the "Great Tribulation," and "waiting for the waggon" (my father looked unaccountably grave, I thought, at this stage of my narrative); what a lot there was for dinner every day; what smart gowns old Lady Lancaster had on, with many more interesting particulars concerning the Wentworth ménage; nor had I the modesty to hide or in any way qualify the fact that Sir Hugh, the middle aged, the desirable, the much-hunted, was the captive of my bow and spear. Then breath failed me, and I stopped, and threw damaged rice among the chickens.

"So you're going to be a great lady, are you, Miss Nelly?" said my father, playfully. "You won't speak to your poor old father, I suppose, when you are Lady Lancaster!"

That little bit of news had cheered him wonderfully; he looked less old, less bowed, all of a sudden, somehow. I leaned my elbows on the pigsty wall, reflectively.

"But, dad," objected I, "I've only said that Sir Hugh liked me; I have not said I liked him; that is a very different pair of shoes!"

My father did not heed my interruption.

"Lancasters and Lestranges!" said he to himself, as if the union of the two names was pleasant to him; "more like the old times! more like the good old times!"

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A cold chill crept over me, as I thought of the baggage-waggon, and the barrack-room, and twopence a year.

"You seem very anxious to get rid of me, dad, " said I, picking bits of lichen from between the slatey gray stones. "Why do you want me to marry Sir Hugh? "

"My poor little lass, " said my father very pitifully, "because I'm wearing my life out, thinking every day, and all day long, what is to become of you when I'm dead and gone—gone to be with the little mother, Nell; I pray God, " he said, very reverently, taking off his hat; "and also, " he added, a minute afterwards, straightening himself, and looking every inch the proud old gentleman he was, "because I believe that to see you raised to your right level again, and doing something towards bringing the old family back into its right position in the county, would add ten years to my life; upon my soul, I think it would! "

I could not dash his hopes—could not tell him that I was engaged to a man money-less, position-less, expectation-less; perhaps I ought to have done so, but I could not find it in my heart. So we turned homewards, I a saddened woman, sore perplexed. The chickens still scratched and pecked happily on the dunghill; the pigs grunted in the ineffable content of warmth and repletion; but to me the sunlight had gone out of grass and trees and shining pebbles.

CHAPTER VI.

AM I wrong in thinking that memory is the cruelest gift ever vouchsafed to man? Perhaps I am wrong to say any gift can be cruel, seeing who it is gives all the gifts, both the sweet and the bitter ones. But I cannot help thinking so. How happy we might be, any of us in our very lowest, forlornest state, if we had no recollection of ever having held a higher joyfuller one. If we had no remembrance of the treasures of love and youth and friendship we once owned, how happy we might make ourselves in the dearth or total absence of those good things. We might bask and roll, oh so lightheartedly in the young spring sun, and sniff at the pretty spring flowers, and drink in the lark's long rhapsody, if the brightness and the sweetness and the melody were not all dashed by the memory of how much grandlier the sun shone, how much fragranter the primroses smelt, how much sweetlier the birds sang long ago, when we had some one to feel and smell and listen with us. For my part, if any fairy were to offer me the choice of a gift, as she did to the hero of the sausage tale, I would not hesitate one minute; I would beg her to give me a great full brimming cup of the wine of forgetfulness, and how greedily I would drink it up! Maundering again! How prosy I am getting! I am afraid I am painting the little cabinet pictures of my life too minutely, too elaborately; like a Dutch painter, I am reproducing the cabbages and onions, the pots and pans of every-day life, exactly, and without elevating them.

If I could, I would fain make a brilliant dashing Turneresque sketch; great breadths of colour, infinite nobility and harmony, in few strokes; but that is above me; if I were to attempt it, I should make but a patchy, blotchy daub. No; I must put in numberless fine lines, carefulest shading and copying, before I can produce anything like Nature; not very like even then.

Here is another Dutch picture. Dolly's bed-room; a little sanctuary of innocence and purity, and maidenly bread-and-butter thoughts you would say, were you privileged to enter and survey it; a small white bed, spotless enough to shelter the slumbers of St. Agnes; with dimity curtains; field flowers in white vases, good little devout prints on the walls; Timothy and Samuel, and the eternal three choristers; Ary Schefferian photographs, and illuminated texts. Texts do impress one so much more, don't they, when they are picked out in blue and yellow, and are playing hide and seek amid numberless

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twirls and scrolls and flourishes? Dolly is sitting at the dressing-table brushing her hair, which, black as night, thick as a mermaid's, waveless, rippleless, lies heavy on her shoulders.

I am sitting on the open window sill, and my small pale face looks out from amongst a bush of curly warm tinted fuzz. We are enjoying a little sisterly chat at our coucher; it is about a week after our return home.

"I wish, " says Dolly, brushing away with vigour, "that people would sometimes manage to get the right end of a story. "

"How do you mean? " I ask, a little absently.

"Oh, nothing particular, " she answers lightly, "only Mrs. Smith has been giving me rather a garbled version of yours and Hugh's adventure, which she says is all over the country. "

I frown. "What do I care? "

"Of course not, " says my sister, smoothly combing out her long dusk locks, "only I don't think it is very pleasant to think of all the grooms in the neighbourhood making merry over Sir Hugh's huggings and kissings and weepings over you, that time you were insensible; are you sure you were quite insensible, dear? "

I toss my ruddy mane in a fury.

"If I wasn't may I be struck dead this instant, and be insensible for ever with a vengeance. "

Dolly lays down her implements, and smiles good humouredly.

"Poor little wooden-headed Damon! " she says, "you'll have to marry him after all, Nell, to stop people's mouths, and prevent their spreading all manner of naughty tales about you and him; what fun! "

"Have to marry a man because I happened to be pitched out of a dog-cart with him? " I say, with a snort, and a withering laugh. "Ha! ha! "

"No, dear, " replies my elder, gravely twisting up her great black hair coils, with warm dimpled hands; "not because you were upset

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out of a dog-cart with him—people will forget that—but because you spent twenty-four hours alone in a little road-side public-house with him, and because everybody knows it, and will not forget it."

A moth floats in from the cool night, and frizzles himself to death in the candle. I feel quite glad. I am in the sort of humour when one is pleased at anything bad happening to anything. Dolly, good Dolly, drew her Bible to her, and looked out the evening lessons.

"By-the-bye, " she said, after a pause, "have not you heard from Major M'Gregor yet? "

"No. not yet, " I have to own, rather reluctantly.

"Rather odd, isn't it? " asks Dolly, carelessly.

"Not the least odd, " I say sharply; but all the same, I do think, and for every hour of the last four days have been thinking that it is odd, dreadfully odd; "of course he would be busy when first he got back to his regiment; of course he'd have a thousand things to do. "

"Well, my dear, if you're pleased, I'm sure I am. "

Dolly read her chapters piously all through, the dark long fringes shade the eyes that travel so devoutly along the sacred lines; how peaceful and holy the fair clear peach face looks. Why upon earth don't I go to bed, instead of sitting swinging my small slippered feet, ill-temperedly, to and fro? How still the great night outside is; the owls are snoring a little in the high elm tops, but that is all. Dolly's Bible clasps close with a little click.

"How very ill papa's getting to look, " she says, looking up serene after her devotions, with a face "Bright as for sins forgiven. " "so much worse than before we went to Wentworth, even. Poor old gentleman! it makes me quite low to look at him. "

I bounce off the window sill, and walk hurriedly up and down, my long blue dressing-gown floating behind me like a toga.

"Did you say that only to frighten me, or because you really think it? " I ask agitatedly.

"Because I really think it, of course, " replies she, gently; "is my sole métier in life to lacerate your feelings? "

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"Seriously ill, do you mean, Dolly? " I ask very falteringly.

Dolly rises and stands by the window; how like a tall garden lily she looks, in her long soft white draperies.

"So ill, " she says, emphatically, "that unless some one leaves him a legacy, or some piece of good luck happens to him, he'll be a dead man this time next year; those bills, and his anxiety as to what is to become of us—of you, I mean—after his death, are knocking a great many nails into his coffin. "

Life without the old man! That was the very first time that that awful, awful thought presented itself to my mind.

"Dolly, " said I, with tremulous eagerness, grasping her arm, "would it do him any good, do you think, would it comfort him at all, if I were to tell him about Dick? "

"Comfort him to know that you had found a man magnanimous enough, or selfish enough, to be willing to starve with you, and effectually prevent your doing anything towards raising the poor old family again, as it has been and is his dearest wish that it should be raised, " said my sister, with trenchant satire. "Yes, of course, it would comfort him immensely, no doubt. I know nothing more calculated to inspire consolation; good night, Nell. "

Dolly sinks on her knees, and prepares to engage in evening prayer, and I slink off to bed, and cry myself to sleep.

CHAPTER VII.

I HAD gone to sleep weeping, as the night does, I awoke smiling as the morning. The troubles that had seemed so gigantic at 11 P. M., had contracted themselves to very moderate dimensions at 7 A. M. From mountains they had become, not indeed quite molehills, but very gentle elevations. Dolly had a way of touching people on the raw; of course it was to her interest to make me believe Dick unfaithful; and as to my father, why he did look rather ill and droopy of late. I had been thinking so, myself, darling old thing! but then the hot weather never suited him; it always made him flag, as it did the flowers; when fresh winds came and cool cloudy skies, both he and they would hold up their heads again, and brighten.

My code of morals, my system of rewards and punishments was very simple, the story book code; later on in life we find that the human race's kicks and half-pence are not administered in strict accordance with the rules of that code. The good boy gets cakes and ale; the naughty boy gets a whipping. There seemed to me an antecedent improbability in the idea of such an enormous grief being laid on the poor slight shoulders of a harmless girl, whose life, as far as overt acts of wickedness were concerned, was a sheet of white paper. It seemed like putting a camel's load on a fly's back. An enormous grief always does seem improbable when it is the first of its family. Its brothers and sisters excite less astonishment, though perhaps no less anguish.

"I saw two magpies yesterday. " I say to myself, "that is a good omen; my letter will come to-day. " I am standing before my looking-glass, sticking up my dead-leaf cables, with long hair pins. I don't look in the least the sort of woman that anything remarkable is likely to happen to; a fair, soft, foolish woman made to say loving inanities to a husband, to make socks for his children, and be utterly hum-drum and common-place and happy. The loud whir-ir-ring of the gong comes sounding upstairs, deadened by the thick oak doors; I run down in a hurry. My father is always up and out very early, long before any of us; while the house is yet in the housemaid's possession. He is out now, and I have to read prayers. I sit down with dignity in the old oak arm-chair, nearly black with age and varnish, and of the most uncompromising straightness of back—what strong spines our ancestors must have been blessed with, for apparently they never indulged in the luxury of leaning—open the

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ancient calf-backed Bible, in which twenty-one and nineteen years ago respectively, my father recorded the doubtful blessing of his daughters' births.

Opposite me, on a long bench, sit the servants, in clean caps and aprons, and behind them open windows, and the sun, and the green trees, and the June airs at play. It is a very long chapter; all about the Israelitish wars, how Joshua and his host took Ai and the king thereof, and the people thereof, and killed them all; and then went off to Libuah, and did the same there, and then on again ditto. How tired they must have got of cutting and hacking those poor Aborigines! About the middle of the bloody annals I look up, and take a glance off through the window over the servants' heads, and see the old postman with the swinging gait and the withered-apple cheeks, shambling down the drive. He is earlier than his wont. I lose my place and grope hopelessly for it with eyes and fingers, for about five minutes. Having found it, I set off at a hard gallop and race through Thursday morning, third week in Thornton's "Family Prayers," skipping the "Queen, the Clergy, and the Children of this family" altogether. I come to Amen, at last; and before the servants are off their knees, I am at the Hall door.

The old postman has gone again; he is half way up to the gate by now; he knows our manners and customs and has left the bag hanging on the bell. I tear it open; the Times and a Pamphlet; half-a-dozen blue envelopes in the usual sprawly tradesmen's hands for Sir Adrian Lestrangle—poor darling Sir Adrian, I wish I might pitch them all at the back of the fire—a pink note, and two letters for Miss Lestrangle, and one letter for Miss Eleanor Lestrangle.

One letter, but alas! alas! not the right one! It is, as I find out later, when I have patience to read it, from a sister of my mother's, an excellent *mère de famille*, ' and its purport is chiefly to tell me that dear Cecilia has had the nettle-rash, and that dear Archie has passed for the Line, and has come out 41st, and, indeed, no wonder, considering the way in which he has been reading for the last three months. Now I throw it down and stamp upon it.

"What's the matter," asks Dolly, coming tripping downstairs; and the young June morning is not fresher or fairer than she. Dolly does not often favour us with her company at our morning orisons.

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"Everything's the matter, " I say exhaustively, picking up my aunt's effusion, and flinging it to the other end of the room.

"Not got your letter yet? "

"No. "

"Dear me! how odd! are you sure it has not slipped inside that Magazine? "

"How could it? " I say gruffly.

"Perhaps you forgot to give him your direction? " (How likely!)

"No, I didn't. "

"Perhaps you did not write it clear enough? "

"I wrote it as plain as a pikestaff! "

"Hm! perhaps he is ill? "

"Don't say that! " I cry eagerly, turning pale, "I'd rather he'd have forgotten me than that; no, I don't think that I would either; oh Dolly, Dolly, what can be the matter? " I sink down on the bench and cover my eyes with my hand.

"Perhaps it'll come to-morrow? " says Dolly; turning away, and in a kinder voice than usual.

"It'll never come! " I say tempestuously, flinging down my head on my arms, on the cold wooden table.

"Sh! Sh! don't make a scene! here's papa! " By a great effort I throw off my own trouble, for the time; defer it to a more convenient season; I can always do that for him, and then I go to the old man and put my arms about him, and thank him for the flowers he has brought—he always brings me a little pretty bunch, summer and winter—and kiss the old pale weary face so lovingly. The dew and the moist night airs have lifted up the heads of the plants and shrubs that drooped so yesterday, but I misdoubt me this old scathed tree will never hold his head up again bravely, till the dear Lord transplants him to a kindlier, warmer clime.

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"This is the day of the Coxes' croquet party, isn't it?" says Dolly, as we sat at breakfast, his 'Fate Shompater,' as Mr. Coxe resolutely calls it; "we need not go till about four I should think, need we?"

"I shall not go at all!" I say doggedly.

"Nonsense," says Dolly, severely, "you must go; you cannot treat people in that way, accepting their invitations, and then never going near them, it's too bearish!"

"I don't want to go!" I say plaintively, turning towards my father, and stretching out my hand to stroke his.

"You want to stay with the old man, do you, Nell? So you shall! So you shall! there's plenty of people to go to the Coxes' fine party without you."

"Just as you please, of course," says Dolly, very coldly; "children of nature are not accountable beings, I suppose; poor Sir Hugh! I'd sooner meet a bear robbed of her whelps, than him in the state he'll be in to-day!"

I frown at her to stop, but the mischief is done.

"Is Sir Hugh Lancaster to be there?" asks my father, lifting up his head.

"Yes, to be sure he is, he is coming all the way down from town, on purpose to see—Amaryllis Coxe."

We all held our tongues for a minute.

"I think, Nell," says my father, rising slowly to leave the room; "I think perhaps, you had better go, they are civil people, and there's no use giving offence."

"I suppose," says Dolly, as we entered the Coxian Park gates that afternoon; "I suppose, we shall finish up with a dance, for I heard Coxe père, telling Lady Capel that his daughters were 'so uncommonly fond of cutting capers, that if they could not have a 'op anywhere else, they got up a kick-up at home.'"

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As we drive up to the door, I see a faint pitying smile flitting over the countenances of the butler and footmen as they glance at our equipage, but they are too well drilled not to stifle it instantly. Mrs. Coxe receives us in the white and gold drawing-room; the gorgeous glare of which makes one's eyes water this bright day. Mr. Coxe tells us that "he is 'appy to see us in 'is 'ouse, " and that "he believes his young ladies are out in the front, and would not we like to join them? " Ploughboys, parsons, doctors, and lawyers may have sons and daughters, but the "Lord and Ladies and the Miss O'Gradys, " alias, the Upper Ten Thousand, and the Coxes have 'young gentlemen and young ladies. ' In Mr. Coxe's vocabulary, a room is an apartment, a house is a mansion or a residence, and a wife is a lady or a partner. He does not mean to be pompous in the least; he can no more help talking Manchester than a dog can help barking. So we step out through the great plate glass windows, which are thrown high up, out on a broad urned and statued terrace, and thence on to the croquet ground, which is mown as short as a convict's hair, and where we find Mr. Coxe's 'young ladies and gentlemen, ' as well as many other people's disporting themselves.

It is hardly saying too much to put croquet as an invention on a level with gunpowder and printing; it certainly is more unmixedly beneficial to the human race than either of the others. Who can be sufficiently loud in praise of a common standing ground, where man and woman can meet without man being effeminate, or woman masculine. It requires a strong effort of memory to realize the barren time when women struggled through their long weary days, unassisted by those gracious twins, croquet and afternoon tea. At the Coxe's croquet party, I need hardly say that there were a great many more women than men. I never yet was at a croquet party where such was not the case, for admirable pastime as it is, no man that is a man, and not a curate, will ever be induced to put his hand to a mallet, unless he has absolutely nothing else to do.

"There was Lady Grease Wristler,
And Madam Van Twister,
Her Ladyship's sister,
Lord Cram and Lord Vultur,
Sir Brandish O'Cultur
With Marshal Carowzer,
And old Lady Mowzer,
And the great Hanoverian Baron Pansmouzer. "

All the fashionable men are up in town of course, so are Lord and Lady Capel; they have gone to the Palace Hotel for a month; a poor equivalent for the house in Park Lane, but better than nothing. So is Lady Lancaster; entertaining kindred frumps and fozzles in Eaton Square.

The Scots Greys are still to the fore, for "England expects every man to do his duty," and their duty is at present to guard the Cathedral Close and Minor Canons of Nantford from invasion. Little De Laney is here too, much to his own disgust. Instead of leaning his jolly little smooth face out of the modest bow-window of his corps' club, he is dancing attendance on a moribund uncle for whose gouty shoes he is lying in wait, the mercenary infant!

"Ammy! Ammy! Amaryllis, my dear!" cries Mrs. Coxe, as we appear on the scene—Amaryllis is mistress of the ceremonies, and is flitting about in an elaborate Parisian toilette, eminently suited for a Chiswick breakfast or a Horticultural Fête, and looks as she mostly does, all nose and bust—"here are the Miss Lestranges, my dear; I hope you can make up a set for them!"

Amaryllis looks doubtful; there are five or six sets in full force already, and how to provide the gentle stimulus of a man or two for each game, is the problem which has been making her curse the day on which she was born for the last half hour. What to do with our pauper population is a joke to it. All the parish priests, and all the red coats, with whatever carefulest economy expended, have been used up.

"There are Mortimer Spencer, and the two Miss Lestranges and myself, that's four," she says slowly; "but that would be so dull for them; there's Sir Hugh Lancaster and Mr. De Laney, but they won't play; my sisters asked them to join their game some time ago, but they would not; they said they did not know how."

"Perhaps," Dolly suggests, with a suave little smile, "perhaps if you ask them again, and make a great favour of it, they would not be so obdurate; people must not be allowed to be lazy on an occasion like this." Amaryllis shakes her head and goes reluctant; two minutes more, and she returns in triumph, leading the two culprits. Hugh, as I am well aware, would be most happy to play dolls, marbles, jack straws, anything were I to be his assistant.

"Little birds that can sing and won't sing, must be made to sing," says my sister playfully, putting out a ready sisterly hand to Hugh, so "your lordships have condescended to yield to our importunities; we were meditating going on our knees, if that were necessary."

"The little birds are quite game for singing till they crack their little throats if anybody'll show 'em how," says De Laney, putting in his little oar. Hugh is never strong at badinage, he has as heavy a hand at it, as a bad cook has with onions. On the present occasion, I appear to have taken away his elderly breath, for he is staring at me as a school boy at a mince pie, as a pig at acorns. Really it is too bad of him, when he has been having the handsomest women in England, in the becomingest dresses passing in review before him every day for the last week, that he should be gaping like a bird in the pip at a simple country girl in a little straw hat.

"What sides? what sides?" asks Amaryllis, "Morty, dear, put that hoop straight."

I go up to Mr. De Laney, who is arranging a little delicate bouquet of heliotrope and geranium in his button hole. "Will you be sure and play with me?" I say eagerly.

The young fellow looks slightly surprised.

"I, of course I will; proudest moment of my existence; only I think it fair to warn you that I never got through a hoop in my life."

"Miss Coxe," I say, lifting up a trembling voice and blushing, "Shall you and I and Mr. De Laney play the other three?"

"That would not be fair," puts in Dolly, with slight asperity in her tone; "you are such a good player; you have given us much the weakest side; you had better let me take your place, that would make it nearly equal!"

"I think," says Amaryllis, coming to my rescue, "that Miss Eleanor Lestranger's arrangement is the best on the whole; Mortimer is much better than I am, and I suppose that Sir Hugh and Mr. De Laney are about equal."

Dolly is too well mannered to oppose the fiat of the mistress of the ground, and she bites her lip, and says smiling, "Well, 'never say die'

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must be our motto, and Mr. Coxe won't scold us very much if we do get him into disgrace, will he? "

Mr. Coxe junior wears barnacles, and his complexion is spotted as the pard's; but his heart is tender. Dolly never puts all her money on one horse; she has many irons in the fire, and Mortimer Spencer De Lacy is her last and smallest one.

"Blue begins; Morty, give Miss Lestrangle the blue. "

I make an inward resolution that where my boy goeth, I will go; that the hoop or the tunnel, or the bell that bids defiance to his inexperienced chocolate ball shall do the same to my practised green; so that I may have an excuse for sticking close into his pocket; it is the first time that the dear little fellow has ever been used as a chaperon, I fancy.

"I did not think I should see you again, " I say, very friendly, anxious to engage in conversation, and edging up to where he stands, dishonestly trying to kick his ball into position without being detected. "I thought you were going back to Windsor. "

"So did I, but l'homme proposes, and l'homme's great uncle by marriage disposes. "

"How tiresome for you; have you got to stay long? "

"Oh, I suppose till the old party up there, " jerking his head in the direction of his uncle's place, "takes himself off to Abraham's bosom, which he does not seem in any hurry to do at present. "

"You don't seem very sorry for the poor old gentleman, " I say, laughing rather nervously and squinting out of the corner of my left eye, to discover the whereabouts of my Sir John Suckling.

"How can he expect one to be sorry for him, when he takes to dying at such an ungodly time? if he had put it off a month now, it would have suited me down to the ground; there's never much doing in July. "

"That's the way somebody will be talking of you by-and-bye, " I say with a smile.

"Not a doubt of it, unless I give them the slip by being cut off in my youth and beauty beforehand," he says, with a grin at the thought of his own demise.

The Coxian croquet ground is to other croquet grounds what the garden of Eden is to other gardens; it is the realization of a croquet player's dream. Flat as a billiard table, big as a race course, with a fountain plashing coolly into a stone basin in the middle, and with lime trees round it. They are all in flower now, and their yellowish, greenish, whitish blossoms make the air almost too heavy. The women in their blue and green and white dresses look like big pretty flowers starring the sunny grass.

Further off, a very smart marquee spreads its flag to the wind—of which, by-the-bye, there is uncommonly little—there, later on, we are to flourish the festive heels. Mr. Coxe comes strutting out presently with his little fat hands in his breeches pockets, and that face which would be of such eminent service to him in a *Jacquerie*, or French Revolution, stamping him so unmistakeably as of the people.

"Well, Miss Lestrangle, and how are we getting on? progressing eh? ha! ha! progressing?"

"Not progressing at all, I'm afraid, Mr. Coxe!" says Dolly smiling; "on the contrary, retrograding, I think!"

"I'm afraid you don't find my son a very efficient coadjutor," continues Mr. Coxe pompously, putting his hands under his coat tails, and standing with his legs rather wide apart. Mr. Coxe will probably be among Lord —'s next batch of lords.

"Quite wrong!" says Dolly, glancing up under her little wild rose-wreathed shepherdess hat at the blushing Mortimer. Bagging Mortimer, is like rook shooting, Dolly thinks; the poorest of all sport, but still it is sport. Then half-a-dozen extra-sized footmen come stalking along, bringing ices and Badminton on superb trays, and we stop pounding one another for a few minutes, and by the aid of these refreshments endeavour to bring ourselves down from boiling point. I see Sir Hugh pouring out a tumbler of Badminton for himself; a nice cooling drink; I hope he'll take a great deal of it. Soon we return to our game with renewed vigour.

"Send her away over there! tight croquet; I should; she plays next. " This is a most unnecessary piece of brutality, for I, with my Grenadier, am struggling for the second hoop, far in the back ground, as I resolved at the outset I would be.

"We stick together like leeches! " the boy said to me, just now, very innocently; "Damon and what was the other f'la's name—something beginning with a P. you know. " My poor green goes spinning off under the limes, disturbing the bees, and I, of course, have to go after it.

"My mother sent her love to you, " says a too, too well known voice at my elbow. Hugh is not like himself to-day, somehow; he has not made a single joke, and he looks sheepish, and tail-between-the-legs-ish. Being in love is sadly unbecoming to a man; particularly to one who is not in the bloom of youth. Little Dresden shepherds in pink coats and blue breeches look pretty when they are casting sheep's eyes at little fat shepherdesses in powder, and red cheeks; but a real live man, sunburnt, hirsute, broadclothed, looks ridiculous. Flight, without the most flagrant incivility, is out of the question.

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to her. "

"I only came down from town last night. "

"Oh! "

"I came down on purpose for this—what d'ye call it—this croquet thing. "

"Oh! "

"Do you suppose I came down to see the Coxes? " Hugh never pays much attention to the requirements of Mrs. Grundy; he is talking now with much more earnestness than the subjects that mostly come up at a croquet party, are calculated to engender.

I look down very demurely, and make a little excavation in the smooth turf with my mallet. "I don't know, I'm sure. "

"Cannot you guess who I came to see? you are sharp enough generally. " (He must be in love to call me sharp; he might as well compliment Dolly on her piety.)

"I don't know, I'm sure! " I say very pettishly; for I perceive that we are the objects of a good deal of amused notice, and I even detect my little naughty soldier chuckling all to himself behind his pocket-handkerchief.

"I cannot bear being asked questions; will you move, please? "

I give my ball a great vicious hit, which sends it flying back to the haunts of men; and I fly after it, at the top of my speed. Hugh follows me, more surprised than sorrowful; he cannot and will not understand. His notions of courtship are like Samson's, who went down to Timnath, and saw a woman that pleased him, and told his parents so, and after that it was all plain sailing. Our game comes to an end at last. Despite heroic efforts on the part of Amaryllis, our side is beaten. It would have been very odd if it had not been; seeing that I had been riding a donkey race, holding in my own jackass, and goading on my adversary's.

"Now for the muffin worry, " says De Laney, as we stroll towards the house, having thrown down our implements of warfare.

"Yes, " I say laughing; "we are all being walked off to have clean bibs and tuckers on! "

The Muffin Worry is an Aldermanic feast; a dinner in all but the name. Everything that a hundred-guinea cook, silver epergnes, gold plate, hot-house flowers, grapes as big as plums, and pines as big as pumpkins could do was done, and yet it all seemed to fall rather flat and dead somehow. Perhaps this was owing to the large preponderance of the fair sex; half a score of women being obliged to come huddling in together. I am led into the room, where first Dick looked away my foolish heart, by Major Somebody—I did not catch the name—he wears golosches and his brother officers always talk of him as 'she. ' On my other side is Violet Cox. Ill-natured he friends have christened the three Miss Coxes 'Free and Easy, ' 'Freer and Easier, ' 'Freest and Easiest, ' Violet is 'Freest and Easiest. ' Violet smokes Regalias, and calls men by their surnames to their faces. Lily smokes cigarettes, and Amaryllis does not smoke at all, because it makes her sick. Image to yourself the ne-plus-ultra of vulgarity, fastness, and good nature, and you have the gentle Violet.

"I never asked you about your spill the other night, " she says, in her loud voice; "I had other fish to fry; ha! ha! you pitched on your head,

didn't you, and kept flourishing your legs in the air, till Hugh Lancaster came and turned you right way up again.

"Oh, hush! hush! " I say in an agony of fear lest she should be overheard.

"Why it was not your fault, though I did hear some cock and bull story the other day, about the horses not having run away at all, and it's being all my grandmother! "

I flush crimson, and my eyes fill with tears.

"How cruel people are! " I say; "what a dreadful world it is! "

"Lor' my dear! he didn't mean to be cruel; he only thought you did it for a lark; I'd have done it as soon as look. "

"Who was it said so? " I asked indignantly.

"Pon my honour I forget—oh yes, to be sure, it was that old rip Leroy—I remember now, because M'Gregor pitched into him so, when he said it, gave it him right and left. "

My heart begins to beat wildly; I see the muslin of my dress agitated by its quick hard pulsations; here is an opportunity for getting some news of him.

"Mr. M'Gregor has gone to Ireland, I believe, " I say faintly.

"Yes, poor old boy! he was as sick as a cat, I daresay, crossing; he's an awful bad sailor; we all cried when he went, and Ammy took to her bed, goodness knows why, for he never looked the same side of the room as her; good looking fellow isn't he? I always say that those destroying angels ought not to be let walk about loose, without tickets on their backs marked 'dangerous. '"

"He is handsome! " I say, turning away my head.

"Morty heard from him this morning, I saw his handwriting; and what did I do but open the letter and read every blessed word in it—wasn't Morty in a stew, oh no! not at all—and he sent his love to us all; wasn't it nice of him? " (He is not ill then; he can write to other people).

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The room swims round me for a minute, then I seize a glass of water, and drink it.

"Was he—was he—pretty well? " I gasp.

"Oh, yes; he seemed very bobbish! he said Cork was very jolly quarters, and there were heaps of pretty girls—goodness me what's the matter with you? why you are as white as the tablecloth—are you going to die? "

I do not die, though I almost wish to. Oh cruel, beautiful King Olaf! are you tired of me already? I knew that a poor stupid ignorant girl like me, was not a fit mate for you!

The long dull feast comes to an end, and the dancing begins in the marquee. There is the same band that they had at Wentworth; clack clack go the bones, and the fiddles squeak, and the everlasting weary tum te tum, tum te tum goes on again.

God knows I had not much inclination for dancing; but even tearing round and round, with dragging feet, and a heart as heavy as lead, is better than the inevitable alternative sitting out with Hugh. I have to dance with him of course.

"Come and take a turn outside, " he says, drawing me towards the scene of our late contest, where the limes' long shadows have thrown themselves all along upon the dewy grass, like black-stoled nuns in prayer; and where the fountain is splashing and falling drip, drip, in silver showers in the moonlight.

"No, no! " I say hastily, drawing back, "I don't want to; the grass is wet. "

"You did not seem to find it so just now, when you were sitting on those stone steps with De Laney ever so long, " he says, rather affronted.

"Please don't tease! " I say with irritation.

"But there's something I want to say to you, " he urges pertinaciously, catching my hand.

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"For goodness sake, don't! " I say rudely; "I'm sure I should not like to hear it. "

As we drove home that night Dolly said,

"Did Sir Hugh propose to you to-day, Nell? "

"No, " said I shortly, "and if he has a grain of sense he never will. "

CHAPTER VIII.

I KEPT a journal in those days; if I wished I could tell you, oh my friends, all I did, and a little of what I thought every day for the next six months. But I think even the patientest among you would go to sleep, or at least would yawn very widely, were I to test your powers of endurance with such an infliction. On the contrary, oh kind unknowns! I will take a great leap in my narration, a leap as big as Pedro Alvarado's; a leap from June to December; the next picture in my little homely Hollandish series is a winter one.

Oh, cruel six months! They have stolen so much from me, and they have given me nothing in return. They found me very rich in hope and love, and pleasant thoughts; they left me nearly bankrupt in them all.

I am standing by my bed-room window, looking out listlessly. The white dimity curtains look chilly and cheerless, and there comes in a draught that would turn a mill under the ill-fitting door; the mignonette in the green box is dead, and the birds are silent. Outside also it looks very dreary. Winter has not come in prettily this year, with his ermine cloak and his ice-diamonds; he is an ugly fellow enough; he has come in meekly, wetly, muggily; the meadows are all sponge, and the roads all pomatum. A green Christmas, they say, makes a fat church-yard, and this Christmas is very green.

Now and again great strong west winds sweep and riot over the land, not cold, but noisy, blowy, blustery, crashing down great tree-limbs, and making chimney-pots and tiles clatter down from house tops and church roofs. I turn away disconsolately from the spectacle of nature's life in death, and look vacantly in the glass.

Can that be the same round, dimpled, laughing face that met me in that same mirror six short months ago; the curse of the daughters of Zion seems to have fallen upon me; "burning instead of beauty." Hollow cheeks; the corners of the mouth drawn down, and the lines about it puckered up, as if with continual weeping; dark deep shadows under the eyes, the great wistful blue eyes that seem to see everything now mistily, dimly through unshed tears; the hair twisted up with such negligent untidiness, as if nobody cared or thought about it any longer; and the figure, the pretty, tall figure drooping and nerveless.

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What is it has dimmed and marred my fair looks so? What evil thing have the rolling hours brought me? What is the cause—what are the causes of the breaking heart that looks out so wanly from that small young face? Shall I tell you? First, then, and oh, far, far foremost, my father is very ill—dying. God is going to take away my dear old dad from me; the old man with whom I walked long ago in the pleasant fields gathering but-tercups, in a white frock and a blue sash—the old man with whom I have had so many little jokes, and such loving little tiffs, he who seems to be woven into the fabric of my very life. Warp and woof must be parted now; the threads of his life be dissevered from mine, for He who made has uttered His fiat of recall; He who gave is about to take away.

When first this terrible thought came home icily to my heart (it was one night, weeks ago, as I knelt at my evening prayers—those prayers out of which one name must so soon drop) I rebelled fiercely against it, pushed it violently from me, it could not, would not be—it was too bad to happen—and my soul went up agonizedly to the great God above me, in intercession for that dear old life, as so many souls have gone up before me, but that prayer found no acceptance.

In nightly vigils on my dark bed, I wrestled and strove with that grisly phantom; I would stand in the breach between him and my old man; he should not come at him, should not smite him with that mighty blade that lays the generations low; but to what purpose? He has put me aside, he is drawing ever nigher, not stealthily, insidiously, but openly in the eye of day, so that all may count his strides, and mark his coming.

So my dear old father is going away from me on a long, long journey, and I don't rightly know what I am to do without him. Is not this enough to make me sad? But besides this greatest cause for woe, I have yet another sore grief, which, but for the advent of the yet more unbearable one, would have seemed to me unendurable; my lover has forsaken me. He on whose love I should have rested, he on whose strong young heart I should have leaned in this bitter hour, has forgotten me; not once in all these weary months has he written to me.

How many days there are in six months, how many post times! Just so many times have I had to undergo the pangs of a most grievous disappointment, a sharp smart stab at first, then a long, dull, weary ache. And I had written to him, oh, so often! very joyfully and very

lovingly first; very anxiously and very lovingly next; then grievedly, bitterly, but lovingly always, and at last I had ceased writing and had sunk into the dumbness of despair.

Dolly did not exult over me much; she reminded me, indeed, that she had warned me against him, and opined that perhaps next time I should be more inclined to take her advice, but on the whole she was goodnatured, and tried to comfort me on the same grounds as would have afforded herself consolation in a like case, viz., his poverty and consequent undesirability; the vanity and nothingness of the passion of love, and lastly, her invariable corps de réserve—Sir Hugh.

And now, oh my friends, do not be very hard upon me; do not call me ugly names, as fickle and heartless; do not sit in judgment upon me when I tell you that I myself have of late been thinking much of this same Sir Hugh; not with more love or less loathing than of yore, but as my possible, probable fate. I wanted to do right, God knows! I thought it must be right to do this, because it was so hard, so difficult, so revolting. I see now that I was wrong, but then my head was full of Iphigenia and Jephtha's daughter-like ideas.

The doctor said that perfect exemption from all care and anxiety might, probably would prolong my father's life for weeks, nay months; and to win so dear, so inestimably precious a boon as his presence among us, for even a few days longer than I otherwise should have it, I was willing to sacrifice all my future years, willing to give my shrinking body to Sir Hugh's arms, and my abhorring soul into his custody, though both body and soul clave still with desperate ineradicable passion to that other.

Since I drew my last life-picture our affairs had become quite desperate; the children of Israel had come down upon us like locusts; a dreadful man with a hook nose, thick lips, and a greasy Hebrew face had come to take an inventory of the furniture and movables. To spare our feelings and obviate the unpleasant necessity of having a strange man quartered upon us, our own man-servant had been turned into a bailiff for the nonce.

My father could not move outside his own pleasure-grounds. "I suppose they will let him pass by to his grave," I thought bitterly. Bills and duns showered like hail about our ears, and there we stood, helpless, defenceless, without hope or refuge. An old dying man, and two poor young daughters in such a case. What could be

pitifuller? Mrs. Smith has just been telling me that "she's mor'lly certain there'll be a hexecootion in the 'ouse afore the week's hout; that there will, drabbit 'em all! "

An execution! Won't that put the finishing stroke to the work of decay and sickness? Will that enfeebled frame ever be able to bear the rough world's jeers at the yawning rifts and rents in the poor old family's sides; those rifts that through so many tired years he has been painfully trying to draw a tattered covering over. Will not the poor gray head be driven to take refuge before its time in the restful grave? I clench my hands. I must do it; I must. My face looks back hard and rigid from the glass at me; "I must, I must;" it seems to say too. As I stand thus in an attitude worthy of Lady Macbeth, the door opens, and Dolly enters hurriedly, without knocking.

"Sir Hugh's here, " she says rather hesitatingly; she does not quite know how I shall take her bit of news; once or twice, lately, I have turned savage under her exhortations and beseechments. I do not turn savage now; I say nothing, only the rigid face in the glass grows rigid. My resolution is to be put to the test soon indeed!

Dolly's beauty is nowise dimmed by grief; sorrow has dug no ugly hollows in her cheeks, nor dulled the sleepy splendour of her eyes. She looks a little pale and anxious, but she manages somehow to do even that becomingly. Nor is her appearance less soignée than it was; her dress is simpler indeed than it used to be; as simple as it can be; but that only serves to make her look younger, more innocently girlish. She wore now a thick black serge gown almost as plain as a riding-habit.

"It will do so nicely for mourning with a little crape on it, " had been the thought in Dolly's mind when she bought that dress—the unexpressed thought, but by some instinct, I had divined that she had so thought, and I hated her for it.

"For God's sake, be civil to him! " she says now, coming up and laying an eager hand on my shoulder, "he is our only hope! "

"I know it, " I say coldly.

"For pity's sake don't snub him! be good to him! do think of somebody beside yourself for once. " (Dolly, of all people, to give that advice.)

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"I don't mean to snub him; I mean to be civil to him; I have made up my mind," I say resolutely, with that dull pain tightening round my heart.

"Made up your mind to marry him! You don't mean it?" cries my sister joyfully, while the prettiest carmine wave ripples into her soft cheeks. "Bon Dieu! how thankful I am!"

"Don't!" I say harshly, pushing her away; her mirth grated horribly somehow on my tense nerves.

"Do make yourself a little bit tidy before you go to him," she says, untying the blue ribbon that binds her own inky hair waves, and preparing to insinuate it among my curly wig. But I resist.

"No," I say doggedly, "leave me alone; I won't be made up for sale; if he chooses to bid for this piece of goods, he shall see all the flaws in it. I don't want to cheat him in his bargain." So I went, limp and crumpled to meet my fate. Before I had given my resolution time to cool, I found myself in the library facing my futur.

He was standing with his back to the fire, whistling softly to himself. Evidently he had called in on his way back from hunting; he had on a very shabby stained old red coat, and very splashed spattered breeches and tops, but somehow he did not look at all a bad fellow, nor an ill-looking one either. When he saw me, he stopped whistling, and dropped his coat tails.

"Well, how is he to-day? not worse, I hope?" he says it very heartily; there is a true ring in his deep voice, as if he really meant it.

"No, not worse. I think much the same, thanks!"

I sit down in my limpness on the sofa, and feel as if I were going to have a leg or an arm cut off, and as if Hugh was the operator, and I wish he would make haste and begin. Oh, if I could but take a whiff of chloroform, and awake to find the limb amputated, the process over, the wooing accomplished. The fire glows ruddy in the wide old chimney; the flames go curling, spiring, quivering upwards. I gaze at the steel dogs in the hearth, and await the operation.

"You've grown very thin since last I was here. " That is how it begins. The surgeon is taking off his coat, and rolling up his shirt sleeves.

"Very likely, " I say, bitterly. "Lying awake at night, and having worries, and being miserable, does not conduce to putting flesh on one's bones! "

"I wish to Heaven I could take half your worries for you; God knows I would if I could; will you let me try? " The kind honest tones, and the kind simple words upset me quite; I am easily upset now-a-days. I pull out my pocket-handkerchief; my face undergoes the odd, droll ugly contortions and workings of a person about to cry, and I burst into bitter tears. My nose reddens, and my eyelids get pink, and I sit rocking to and fro, and feeling a very desolate little girl indeed.

"Won't you let me go halves in all your troubles, dear? " he asks, very gently.

He has come and stood close before me in his eagerness, and intercepts my view of the steel dogs. I look up through my tears straight at him. I am relieved that we are getting to business so soon.

"Do you mean that you want me to marry you? " I ask, bluntly.

"Yes, I do, " he says, simply; "you know I do; you know how long I have been wishing and longing for it. "

There is a little pause—a little minute, when my thoughts go back miserably to that curled Greek head, to those dark, passionate, gray eyes that looked so true and were so false; then I say very slowly and with infinite difficulty—

"I will—do as you wish, if—if—you will—lend me—give me—some money—a great deal; oh dear—oh dear! "

My sobs burst out fresh, I feel so degraded in my own eyes. He did not ask me what I wanted money for—no doubt he divined; only the jollity died out of his honest face, and a pained look took its place.

"Of course you know, " he said, very heartily, "I hope I need not tell you that—that you are welcome, most welcome to every farthing I

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possess, to make ducks and drakes of, if you like; but—but I don't want you to marry me for that. "

"If I take money from you I must marry you, " I said, calmly. "I could not do it else. "

It seemed to me the most matter-of-fact piece of barter in the world; so much young flesh and blood for so much current coin of the realm.

"Why, won't you try and like me? " he says, passionately. It seems hard to him that his house, and his lands, and his dirty money should count for more with me than his loving heart, and his tender, faithful eyes; and as he speaks he throws himself on the sofa beside me.

"I will try and like you, " I say, conquering myself, setting my teeth, and vanquishing my intense desire to say something very rude, and rush away from him; but even as I speak I shudder at his proximity.

"We might be so happy; " he says, rather plaintively. "I am not a very hard fellow to live with, I don't think; I've never had a word with mother all these twenty years, and you'd be easier to get on with, I fancy, than she is, poor old lady! "

"We will try and be happy, " I say, firmly, and I give him my hand.

The operation is nearly over now, and I am alive after it. Then I am gathered to the middle-aged heart, to the stained red coat, and the gray knitted waistcoat, and kissed, and thanked, and blessed, and adjectived. I tear myself away at last, and escape to my room, where I fling myself on my bed, and scrub my desecrated countenance, and wail, "Oh, Dick, Dick—oh, my love, my love! " to the unresponsive pillow.

CHAPTER IX.

SIR HUGH must have abandoned the pursuit of the wily fox at an early hour on that memorable afternoon, seeing that it was but half-past two, when, the deed being done, he rode off on his long raking bay mare—rode off to go and tell his mamma of his prowess, and of what a lovely, willing bride he had achieved. Only half-past two; there was therefore ample time for my father and me to take our daily stroll; that stroll which we still took, though it had become such a woeful piteous shadow of what it used to be. No earthly persuasion could induce my father to give in to being an invalid, to stay in bed and have a doctor. Every day he would get up and dress; would come down stairs, and sit in the library; would sit in his usual chair, and read his usual books; but every day the dressing and the coming down stairs took longer; every day the wheels of the chariot drove more heavily; every day the silver cord loosened—loosened; every day the frail vessel of that dear life drifted ever faster—faster out, into the great desolate homeless sea of Death. As well as any one could tell him, he knew that he was dying—knew that the few last sands of his hour glass were dribbling slowly out; no need to break the news to him. To “break” implies that the news is bad; but to him this was not ill news; to him it seemed an evangel—“good tidings of great joy.” But though he so well knew that solenmest fact—perhaps the more so because he did so know it—he seemed now to taste a deeper, tenderer joy than ever, even of yore, in Nature’s sweet presence; even in her leafless trees, her riotous western breezes, and her chill December suns.

And thus it came to pass that we two who were so close to each other now; we, who, a month hence, should be severed far as time is parted from eternity, walked out together every day, gravely and lovingly.

At first our walk comprised pleasure ground, farm-yard, and home wood; but then, after a little, we had to drop the wood, had to say a long good-bye to it—to the pleasant wood with its oaks, and its tangled briars, and its crimson dogwood—for it lay on a rising ground, and taxed too hardly the poor struggling, difficult breath.

A week more, and the farm-yard is abandoned for a like cause. Every day the walk grows shorter, the steps slower, the end nearer! God! What torture can be comparable to that of standing, with one

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dearer to us than life, on the edge of that awfulest, blackest gulf, seeing him slipping, slipping down into it, unable to stretch out a finger to prevent him; to help him back again up the kindly hither bank.

On the afternoon of my betrothal, we were as usual creeping with tedious lagging steps along the gravel walk, round the flowerless flower-beds, stopping every ten paces to take breath. My father was wrapped up in his old great-coat, (ah me, how he used to eschew great coats in bygone days!) and I, with my arm passed through his, am trying to help on his tottering steps, without his finding out that he is so helped.

"I think you seem to be walking a little better to-day, dearest old man!" I say.

"Am I, Nell? I'm not a very grand traveller, I don't think."

We stop, and look over the wire fence at the drenched-looking grass, at the rich, wet, loamy earth.

"If this mild weather lasts, we shall be seeing the crocuses out in flower here, in another month," I say.

"I shall never see the crocuses again!" says my father, simply.

A rush of tears blinds me, and through them I look up at the yellowing sunken face—the face that is so immeasurably more to me than all the world besides, —more, ten thousand times, than even my beautiful false lover—and I know that he speaks truth; that I shall be looking at the crocuses' golden blaze alone. In a few minutes I swallow back my tears; I have all the rest of my life-time to weep in, but they must not come now; not now! not now! I say, gently pressing the dear arm that leans so feebly on mine.

"You must not say melancholy things to-day, darling old daddy, for I have got such a nice piece of news for you!"

"News! have you, Nell?" says he cheerfully. "Why, little lass, you're getting like the Athenians, that spent their time in nothing else but either to hear or to tell some new thing."

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Some spirits can jest and joke even on the verge of that gulf that swallows time and space, nor with any irreverence towards the Great Presence, in whose antechamber they stand waiting

"Like infants, sporting by the roar
Of the Everlasting Deep, "

Such was my father.

"This is a real bit of news, " I say, smiling; "good news too, " I add, though the words go nigh to choke me. We are walking on again slowly, beneath the great ash trees that spread black skeleton arms to the low dun sky.

"Good news has forgotten the road here, I think, Nell, for this long and many a day, " says my father, with a weary sigh. I look down and fumble with the lowest button of my jacket.

"Sir Hugh Lancaster has been here again to-day, " I say, in a coy, low voice. My father stops suddenly, and leans both hands on the top of his stick.

"Has he? " he says, eagerly; "is your news about him, Nell! "

I blush.

"Yes, he asked me to marry him; or I'm not sure that it was not I that asked him to marry me, " I say, with rather dreary merriment; "anyhow, we settled it between us: it is to be! "

"Thank God! " says my father, very reverently, under his breath; "then there'll be somebody to take care of my little lass when I'm gone! "

"Is it good news, dad? did I say true! " I ask, throwing a pair of loving young arms about his neck, and laughing hysterically.

"That it is! " he says, heartily, and the strength seems to have come back into his voice. "I can say, 'Nunc dimittis, ' with all my heart now, Nell; I could not have departed quite in peace before, when I thought of leaving my little Nell to be a poor little ill-used governess; but now, " he said, with a dash of his old pride, "she'll be able to

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hold up her head among the best in the county, as she ought, God bless her! "

"What good will it do me to hold up my head as high as Haman's, if you're not by to see it and be glad of it? " I ask, desolately. Long dreary years, forty, fifty, sixty perhaps, flash before my mind's eye, years of a bondage whose full horrors my innocent young soul but vaguely takes in; years with Hugh, and without papa.

Oh, why could not I die of consumption, like that girl I took the jelly to yesterday? Why could not I cough myself out of the world, as she was doing so fast? "On the —th instant, at Lestrangle Hall, Eleanor, younger daughter of Sir Adrian Lestrangle, of rapid decline, aged nineteen. " And Dick would see it in the Times, and be compunctious, and his grand deep eyes would fill with remorseful tears, and he would rush away to the wars—those vague wars of which I always had so convenient a stock in my mental repertoire—and die, covered with wounds, and kissing my photograph.

This was the gloomy form my castle-building took now; a picturesque death was the only thing I seemed to have strength to long for.

"Nell, " says my father, breaking in upon a paragraph descriptive of Dick's glorious demise, in "Wild Mahratta battle, " that I was composing, "Do you remember my reading 'King Lear' to you once? "

"Yes, " I reply, wondering a little, "long ago; and you used to call me your little Cordelia; I remember, "

"Well, darling, " he says, with a pensive little smile, "do you remember what Kent says when the poor old King is dead— 'He hates him that would on the rack of this tough world Stretch him out longer. '"

"Oh, dad! dad! " I cry in the bitterness of my soul, clinging about him. "Why cannot you take me with you? Oh, we have been such friends, haven't we? Oh, you're not going to leave me behind! "

"Hush, hush! " says he, soothingly, patting my hot wet cheek. "What will the fine new lover say if we let you wash all the colour out of

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your eyes with crying; God knows best, Nell! God knows best! we must try and think that! "

"I cannot think it, " I say, desperately, "and I won't; I don't believe it. "

After that we walk along in silence to the hall-door; I saying over and over to myself, in utter heart sickness, "He doesn't know best! He doesn't! He doesn't! " and dashing myself like a little foolish useless wave against the great adamant rock of the Omnipotent Will.

CHAPTER X.

"A still small voice spake unto me.
Thou art so full of misery,
Were it not better not to be? "

IS there any one among us, who, at some moments of their lives, has not heard that voice asking them this despairing question? Is there any one who, at some moment or other, has not been tempted to answer "Yes, far, far better! " Is there any one, whoever thinks at all, that has not had black minutes and hours—minutes and hours when he says blankly, hopelessly to himself, "There is no God: there can be no beneficent Deity to love us and take care of us, or he never would let us be so very, very desolately wretched. " Sometimes we feel that we must curse God and die; it would be such a relief to us; curse God, as Job's wife is supposed to have urged her much enduring lord to do, as a cure for his boils; that is, if she did not urge him to bless God and die, as the word has either signification: in which case the poor woman's character for piety has been shamefully taken away for the last three or four thousand years.

Sometimes we say to ourselves that surely some malevolent tricky demon must have the world's government reins in his fiend hands—some demon that delights in thwarting our poor little plans, in inventing new and ingenious diseases to rack our poor patient bodies. Our very wishing anything seems to drive the object wished for farther away; our very dreading anything seems to draw the dreaded object magnetically nearer. In every newspaper we take up, we see "melancholy suicides, " "horrible murders, " "fatal accidents, " "economic funeral companies; " and often we lay it down with a dull numb feeling that the world is all out of joint; all discord and jangling dissonance.

But there is a Book, a simple, old-fashioned eloquent Book, that tells us that "the fashion of this world passeth away, " the fashion—the old, old fashion that we are all so weary of—the fashion of being wicked, and being sick and disappointed and heart sore; and whoso believeth that it is so passing, straight way there is to him harmony and peace and order. Never through all the monotonous self-repeating centuries, during which this old globe has gone lumbering round the sun, has there been an instance of instinct misleading any of the creatures in which it has been planted; and as surely as some

inner voice whispers to the swallows, telling them then it is time for them to come flying over the foamy green seas to the English spring trees and fresh fields, so surely does some higher instinct, proportioned to our higher, nobler nature, bid us plume our wings for a flight, when life's winter is over, to some distant spring land, where great melody and sweet health and content are waiting for us; some land where "all crooked things shall be made straight, and all rough places be made smooth." But great sorrows are in their nature like mountains, closing in the horizon, preventing our catching a glimpse of any of the fields, where "You scarce can see the grass for flowers," of the summer waves tumbling and joyfully tossing up red sea-tang on sun-lit yellow sands, of feathery larch woods, and blue rushing brooks, that there may be, that we know are, beyond them.

I seemed now in my complete life-hatred and bitterness to be prisoned in some narrow black valley—some deep gulley between great frowning granite peaks. I could not climb up their smooth slant sides, to see the sunrise washing the low morning clouds, and the gray morning billows with his flamy streams. I was groping with hands stretched out before me blindly, among the boulders and the pit-falls, and the sullen black pools in the valley bottom; and I must stay groping there as I felt, till the oil of my life's lamp were burned out, till I sat down and died there amid the darkness and the doleful beasts and the murky stagnant waters.

"If," thought I, "I had been an old roué of seventy, who had dedicated all my three score and ten years to the debasing of soul and body, I could hardly have incurred more woful penalties than my nineteen summers of insipid innocence had drawn upon my devoted head." Not even the consciousness of having made a sacrifice that raised me (at least in my own estimation) to a level with the Jewish maiden I have before alluded to; not even the consciousness of having been "high heroical" supported me much. I did not grudge the sacrifice I had made; if it had to be done over again, I should do it over again; but I thought myself entitled to make as many wry faces over it as I felt inclined, and their name was legion.

One day, Dolly entering, cat-like, in her long, straight serge gown, found me grovelling—lying all along on the floor, prone, while tears rushed in rivers from my foolish blue eyes, and laid the dust on the carpet.

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"Are you dead, Nell? " she asks quietly, holding the door in her hand; "because if so, I'll send for the coroner. "

"No, " say I, blubbering noisily, and burrowing still farther into the dim blue squares of the old Kidderminster. "Worse luck—I wish to God I was. "

"Are your bowels yearning still over the big wax doll? " she asks, jeeringly. "Have you retired into your chamber to weep there? "

"Yes, " I say, angrily, lifting up my head, and pushing back my wet, fuzzy locks; "and since it is my chamber, and not yours—"

"You'd thank me to 'absquatulate, ' as the Yankees say, " interrupts she, laughing and showing the sweetest, shortest, whitest little set of teeth that ever set dentist at defiance. "Well, I will in a minute; but 'I have an errand unto thee, oh, captain. '"

"I wish your errand was to tell me that I was going to be hanged, or that you were; I'm sure I don't know which would give me the most gratification, " growl I, squatting still Job-like in the ashes.

"You're a little fool, my sweet Nell, " says my sister, playfully. "I don't believe you'd relish a bit of whiplash round your little neck any more than I should; but really, " she went on, gravely, "I wonder you have not more spirit than to be boo-hooing about that scoundrelly longlegs; if any man had served me such a turn, " she said, clenching her right hand into a small white ball, while her sleepy eyes woke up into beautiful fierce life, "I might have killed him, put a pinch of strychnine into his tea, or stabbed him in the back on the sly—indeed, I'm sure I should; but cry over him, put my finger in my mouth and pipe my eye, never, never, never! " (a crescendo scale, ending in fortissimo).

"If you talk of meanness, " I cry, springing to my feet and stamping, "I wonder what can be meaner than selling yourself like a bale of goods or a barrel of beer, as I'm doing. Oh, what do I care how mean I am! What sin is there so big that I would not commit it this minute, and commit it most gladly too, if I could but have him back here this minute in this room. Oh, he has not forgotten me! I know it! I know it! There's some mistake, I'm sure, and I shall find it out when it's too late—when I'm in hell! "

I fling myself down again, and cry aloud; my punishment seems greater than I can bear. Dolly walks to the window and looks out.

"Oh, Dick, Dick! " I groan, "where are you? where are you? Oh, my darling, are you dead? Oh, come back to me, for God's sake! "

I forget even Dolly's sneering presence, I forget my father, forget everything but that one man that made earth first heaven—then hell for me!

Dolly goes to the wash-hand-stand and pours some cold water into a basin.

"Stop, crying, " she says, harshly; "you have made your bed, and you must lie on it. Sir Hugh is here again—of course he has a right to come now; and you'd better try and bathe the swelling and redness out of your eyes, if we are to get any money out of him. You don't look a choice morsel to bribe any man with as you are now. "

Her cold voice calls me back to myself. I rise and pick up my heavy cross, and prepare to stagger along a little farther under it. I sponged and mopped my face, and scrubbed it with a Turkish towel, and then I looked in the glass; and then I mopped and scrubbed again, and tried to persuade myself that I did not look as if I had been crying.

Half an hour after I am sitting on the green settee by the library fire, with the gentleman by whose library fire I am to sit through my life, with what patience I may.

His arm is round my waist, and he is brushing my eyes and cheeks and brow with his somewhat bristly moustache as often as he feels inclined—for am I not his property? Has not he every right to kiss my face off if he chooses, to clasp me and hold me, and drag me about in whatever manner he wills, for has not he bought me? For a pair of first-class blue eyes warranted fast colour, for ditto superfine red lips, for so many pounds of prime white flesh, he has paid down a handsome price on the nail, without any haggling, and now if he may not test the worth of his purchases, poor man, he is hardly used! As for me, I sit tolerably still, and am not yet actually sick, and that is about all that can be said of me. Presently the situation becomes too warm for me.

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"May I move a little, please?" I say, edging away out of my owner's arms. "I'm rather—rather hot, please—the fire, I mean."

"All right," says he, cheerily; "it is a fire to roast an ox, isn't it? let's move the settee back a bit, and then we shall be all serene—shan't we, love?"

So we move the settee back into the shade, where the fire glow cannot reach us, but my blood does not grow any the cooler, for that accursed, girdling arm is still round me—my buyer's arm—that arm that seems to be burning into my flesh like a brand.

"Jolly this, isn't it?" whispers Strephon, chuckling; "and it'll be jollier still when we're married; it'll be always like this then."

When we're married! Merciful Heavens! If the prologue is so terrible, what will the play be?

"If you please," I begin again meekly; "I—I think I'd rather sit on a chair by myself; you—you—hurt me rather."

I remove myself, unopposed, to a distant chair, and breathe freer.

"I thought you promised you'd try and like me, Nell," says Hugh, rather ruefully, by-and-by.

"I will try, I will indeed," I cry eagerly, clasping my hands, "only—oh do, do give me time!"

"Give you time, indeed," says Strephon, grimly, glancing at his own weather-beaten face in the glass; "all very fine, but I have not so much time to give; by the time you have made up your mind whether you like me or not, I shall be a drivelling old fool, past caring for any woman's liking."

I answered him to never a word, I agreed with him so fully as to his great age.

"One would think," pursues he, stalking up and down in a fume, "to hear you talk, that I had a humpback, or a club foot, or some great natural deformity;" and then he steps before me, and says with a certain rough pathos in his voice, "Won't you tell me, Nell,

what there is about me so repugnant to you, that I may try and mend it? "

A terror seizes me; beaked Israelitish faces swarm before my mind's eye; am I recklessly tossing away salvation in the shape of those signed cheques on Coutts' Bank, that are lying in simple beauty on the table.

"Don't talk nonsense, " I cry pettishly, giving my head a little ill-humoured jerk; "when did I say there was anything about you repugnant to me? Cannot you understand that it is not so easy to get very fond of a person all in a minute, when you have not been thinking of anything of the kind before; I told you I'd try and like you, and I will: what more can I say? Oh please, please have patience with me! " I cried, piteously.

"Haven't I been patient already? " he asks, sorrowfully. "I'm not an impatient fellow ever; it isn't my nature. I don't expect to sow and reap the same day, but I don't know how it is, you seem to like me less and less every time I come. "

No answer: a guilty head hangs down low, lower, till it droops on a guilty breast.

"If, " says Hugh, quite gently, though his honest face is working a little, as with some strong smothered emotion, "you feel that you can never have anything but a bare toleration of me, say so at once, child? I'm old enough and strong enough to bear a little disappointment; we can't expect to have everything our own way in this world, and I know I'm not quite the right cut to take a girl's fancy; it would be better you should speak out, while it's time, than that we should make each other miserable for all our lives. "

I gaze long and earnestly into the fire, before I answer; watch the little firescapes crumbling, dissolving, and reform- ing, while my hot white hands twist and wrench and generally maltreat each other. Shall I take him at his word? Oh God! how delicious it would be; it would be like exchanging the fetid stifling air of an eastern dungeon for the free gales rioting under the blue April heavens.

Shall I get off the altar, where, (à la Jephtha's daughter, I am lying bound; slip the cords off my wrists, and walk lightly away? Shall I still be able to think of that laughing debonair glorious face, without

stabs of despair—of those strong arms where I may yet find heaven, without deadly sin? Shall I defy the might of Israel? Shall I let the “hexecootion” have its way? Shall I kill my old dad? Never. For him I have begun this great sacrifice; for him I will complete it; for him I will go to hell. So I speak quite firmly, even though I feel myself paling to the lips—Sir Hugh’s lips.

“No, I have said it, and I mean to stick to it; let us try and make the best of one another; it’s a very puzzling world, and it’s very hard to know how to live through it; but I suppose if we try to do our best, it’ll all come right in the end.”

So I, in my despair.

Then he says, with some difficulty, and flushing scarlet, despite his nine lustres—

“If you’re only marrying me on account of that dirty money—”

I interrupt him, hastily.

“Nonsense,” I cry, “say no more about it; I mean to be your wife, and I suppose we shall manage to scratch on pretty much as other people do.” But to my own heart I say that “I would that I were dead.”

CHAPTER XI.

THERE is a great sacrifice to the fore; a hecatomb offered at the altar of filial affection; a pretty white lamb is being led out, be-figged, be-ribboned, be-filleted to the slaughter. Pipe and tabor go too-tooing before her, and the butcher, with his sharp knife gleaming, walks behind her. But the lamb knows that she is going to the sacrifice, and she bleats very piteously.

Now for the key to this graceful metaphor. I am the lamb, Hugh is the butcher, Dolly is the pipe and tabor, and the slaughter is our nuptials. I had looked upon our marriage as a distant possible evil, huge and horrible indeed, but rendered indistinct and vague by extreme distance; much as we look upon the Day of Judgment, or the day of our death, and lo! here it was at the very doors.

One day, very meekly and diffidently, for he began to perceive that his turtle dove had not much coo in her, Sir Hugh suggested that there was no possible reason why our marriage should be delayed; that there was, on the contrary, every reason why it should be hastened. But mild and deferential as was the poor fellow's mode of address, I blazed out upon him; thrust the idea miles away from me, and snubbed him for his want of feeling, in talking of marrying and giving in marriage, when my father was in the state he then was. That was in the morning; in the afternoon, my father repeated Sir Hugh's very words almost.

The daily walk had been given up by this time: all day long my old man sat in his leathern arm-chair, waiting—waiting. The pitcher was breaking very fast now; it would go but few more journeys to the fountain.

All day nearly, I sat beside him on a low stool, holding his hand, kissing it every now and then, and watering it with tears, as the Magdalen did that tender God-hand, that is stretched out ever to heal all wounds.

"'I'm wearing awa', Jean,
Like snow when it's thaw, Jean,
I'm wearing awa', Jean,

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To the Land o' the Leal, "' says my father softly, brokenly; for speech is getting difficult, breathless to him. "It's rather hard work, Nell, 'wearing awa'; I wish I could be quicker about it. " My hot tears and kisses fall on the worn hand I must so soon loose for ever, but I cannot answer him in words. "Hugh is a good fellow, isn't he?" says my father, presently. "I like to think of his being so fond of my little girl; I wish you and he were married, Nell! "

"Do you, Dad?" I say, choking.

"Yes, little lass, and then he could take you home and comfort you, when I'm gone! "

"Cold comfort, I think, Dad, " I say, laying my russet head on the arm of his chair, "but if—if it'll give you any pleasure, I'll marry him to-morrow. " And this was how it came about.

"The Queen laid her white throat on the block,
Quietly waiting the fatal shock. "

The parson has been advertised, the licence and the ring have been bought, and we are to be made one, as fast as bell, book and candle can make us. How sound I slept on the night before my bridal; people going to be hanged, or guillotined, or beheaded, always do, they say. I slept, and I had a very fair dream; a vague sweet dream of flowers—great, beautiful flowers, crimson and white and azure, and of a garden. And among the flowers, and in the garden, I saw Dick; saw him in all his beauty, saw

"The knotted column of his throat,
The massive square of his heroic breast,

And arms on which the standing muscle sloped; " saw him coming quickly over the springy green turf to meet me, with a great glory of sunshine about his stately head; and I stretched out eager arms towards him, and cried, "I'm coming, love, I'm coming! " and so crying, I woke to find myself embracing the empty air; woke as Nelly Lestrang for the last time in my life.

"This is my wedding day. " With what trembling rapture, with what shy shrinking from her own great passionate joy, has many a girl said this. I felt no tremor, no shyness; only a huge loathing, an infinite despair! One forgets to be coy and maidenly, when one's

every pulse and nerve is thrilling with a mighty horror; when, loving one man frenziedly, one is about to be delivered over, bound to the tender mercies of another.

No friends came together to see me wed; there was no sound of mirth or music about the dim old rooms: this was no time for merry-making, when the head of the Lestranges was nearing his last dark home. This ceremony was, we all felt, but the precursor of a solemn, sadder one. Only one uncle, a selfish bachelor colonel, had been drawn down reluctant, from his clubs and his comfortable chambers in the Albany, into the murk, wintry country, to give me away.

Eleven o'clock was the hour, at which the poor lamb's throat was to be cut; the female martyr ascend the pyre. As the time drew near, Dolly and Mrs. Smith and Mary the housemaid, all came bustling and fussing about me, in my little shabby, chill chamber; giving a tweak here, and a pull there, and a jerk somewhere else, to one or another of my wedding garments, as seemed good in their eyes. I, meanwhile, stood gazing stonily at myself in the glass. I was dressed in a white muslin gown, as simple as a nun's, a white cloak and a little white bonnet, and I looked as like a snow-drop as possible; as fair, as cold, as passionless. My face was not distorted and blurred with tear marks now; my tears seemed all shed: I had been a spend-thrift of them lately.

To-day, I could not have wept to save my life. A very miserable looking face the looking-glass gave back to me, but a very lovely one, as I could not help seeing: lovelier in its colourless, hopeless wistfulness, with its great blue eyes, and its ruddy billowing hair, than even Dolly's in its subtle Eastern sweetness.

"I'm worth my price," I say to myself, bitterly.

Then they get me downstairs somehow, and into the Noah's ark of the family coach. As we drive along to the church, I sit staring blankly before me, while my uncle, the Colonel, a little withered spick-and-span cock-sparrow, chirrups small old-world politesses to Dolly, —whom he thinks "a monstrous fine woman, egad,"—his style of commendation savouring of the Regency—and who takes them suavely, honiedly, as she would take the vilest, most opprobrious epithets ever applied to woman to-day, being, forsooth, in highest good humour.

The air is full of snow; flakes are sailing crookedly down to join the other flakes lying already on tree, and hedge-row, and field. There seems no horizon to-day, no definite boundary to the prospect—sky and earth are mixed and jumbled up together; it is freezing and thawing, freezing and thawing every five minutes.

At the lych gate we get out. My uncle gives me his arm, and leads me up the narrow gravel walk, where half a dozen perished school-children, three blue-nosed, pinched old women, and a purple hobbledehoy are assembled as witnesses of this gay show. There is a thin white shroud stretched over the sloping green mounds, thin and scant as a beggar's cloak; the snow has dropped her chill, pure pall over the quiet dead as they lie slumbering together in families and households.

Sir Hugh—my Sir Hugh, my own—and his best man, the large-headed young cotton lord, meet us at the church door; Sir Hugh in a blue frock-coat, a blue tie, and a red-brown countenance, which all set each other off very nicely. "There was colour in his cheek, There was lustre in his eye," and there was a bouquet as big as a haystack in his hand, a bouquet of delicatest hot-house ferns and whitest hot-house flowers, flowers waxiest of petal and heaviest of scent. This posy he immediately presented to me, and Lord Stockport, of the many mills, did likewise with a lesser haystack to Dolly. I said, "thank you," coldly, took it and held it in my hand, without its ever occurring to me to smell it or notice it any further.

Then we arranged ourselves before the altar. Of course, Hugh disposed himself on the wrong side of me, and had to be pushed, and nudged, and scolded into his right place. Then Mr. Bowles, whose long nose was redder than a plume reft from the flamingo's using, and whose teeth I heard like castanets played by a skilful hand, opened the prayer-book, and began to tie the first loop of the Gordian knot. I paid but small heed to his exhortation; my eyes kept wandering from Sir Adrian Lestrangle, who "obdormivit in pace, ætat 26," in gray marble at my right, to Sir Brian, who "departed this life in the 24th year of his age," in white marble at my left. He was deeply regretted; Sir Adrian was not apparently. We were not a long-lived family, any of us.

"I require and charge you both, as ye shall answer at the dreadful Day of Judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed," said the Rev. Bowles.

He read at a hand-gallop, and very much through his nose, but, try as he would, he could not take quite all the dignity and awe out of that solemnest adjuration. It called back my straying thoughts; it stirred my apathy. The cold, vault-like air crept through my thin clothing, and chilled the marrow of my bones; and a colder, bitterer chill grasped at my heart, as I listened to the grave, grand words.

Then Sir Hugh was asked whether he would "take this woman to be his wedded wife, " and he said, "I will, " in his strong bass voice, heartily, loud, out, as if he meant it, and as if he was glad to be asked. And the same question was put to me with regard to "this man, " and I said "I will" also; but said it with as much life and animation as a doll shows when she opens her eyes, the string at her side being pulled.

So he, Hugh de Vere, takes me, Eleanor, "till death us do part, " and I, Eleanor, take him, Hugh de Vere, and do it with a bad grace, as if I would not have taken him if I could have helped it, and then Hugh put the ring—pledge of a worse than Egyptian bondage—over my cold, reluctant fingers, and the bells clashed out, and we were man and wife, and I knew that now I could reach my darling's arms only through the billows of sin or the floods of death.

The deed being done, and Mr. Bowles having made his congratulations as intelligibly as his chattering teeth would allow him, we signed our names—Hugh de Vere Lancaster, very bold and firm; Eleanor Lestrangle, very wobbly and illegible; and then Hugh hurried me off into his brougham, which was waiting at the gate.

"God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, " says the proverb, and I thanked God devoutly that that drive was but a short one. During it I spoke not a word; if I had attempted to utter, I felt that I should have shrieked aloud in my great agony.

I find my father in the hall, come out to welcome back his little daughter. He has put his old Sunday coat on to do me honour—the coat that I remember so many years, and which is so much too big for him now, hangs about him in such pitiful folds and wrinkles.

I throw myself passionately into his arms.

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"Kiss me, dad—kiss me! " I cry, a little wildly. "I don't feel like myself to-day, somehow. I'm your Nell still—aren't I? —though I am married. "

My father holds out his hand to Sir Hugh, and smiles his pleasant, tender smile.

"She has been made such a pet of all her life, you see, " he says, with gentle apology.

(Death is smoothing all the little asperities out of him, dear noble old father.)

"She has been her old father's spoilt child—haven't you, Little Nell? You'll be good to her—won't you? She has been a very loving little daughter to me, and they say good daughters always make good wives—don't they? "

Then he stops, out of breath.

"I will be good to her, indeed, Sir Adrian, " says Hugh, solemnly, "so help me, God. "

And he has been good to me, honest fellow—he has kept his word.

CHAPTER XII.

I MAY put away all the bright colours out of my paint box, for they have gone out of my life; so I need no longer lake, or carmine, or ultra-marine. My few more pictures are dark as Rembrandt's; without his forges, and fires, and patches of crimson light to set them off. I made but one stipulation with my husband; and that was that immediately after the ceremony, he should return to Wentworth, en garçon, and leave me in peace, to tend and nurse my father, until—I did not express in words, until what; hardly to myself did I dare give shape and substance to my woe—until the end. I had sacrificed myself, in order to prolong my old man's life, and on the day but one after my wedding, he died.

Thus it is with our little feeble plans and designs, in this troublesome world. The sacrifice had been offered in vain. I have told you how strenuously my father opposed all endeavours to make an invalid of him. Well, on that last day he had to succumb: the stout spirit had to give in to the failing flesh; One, mightier than he, overcame him.

So he lay in bed, very quietly, very patiently, waiting, —waiting, and panting sorely. During all those dragging, weary hours, I sat by him, holding his hand; as if that could keep him back from the gulf he was nearing. The snow floated down noiselessly on the window sill, and rested there, soft and flaky: the clock ticked monotonous, and the short wintry day sloped westward towards the night.

"It's all up with me, Nell, " said my father, faintly; "I'm getting a very broken-winded old horse, aren't I? "

By-and-by I got mother's old Bible, with her dim faded pencil-marks; the shabby little Bible he always used; and read him bits out of it; comfortable, tender promises suited to the weakness of approaching dissolution; and he said,

"Thank you, little lass, it's very nice; " but he could not attend to me long. It is hard work dying; a bitter weary tussle; but ah! surely it is harder seeing another die. I sat and listened to the gasping breath, that grew ever quicker, harder, shorter; it made me out of breath myself to hear him labouring, panting so. O God! how

I longed to be able to

"Give him half my powers,
To eke his being out."

Then day died, and the snow lay thicker, and the darkness fell. Presently Mrs. Smith came in with ostentatious tiptoe tread, and came creaking over, with a cup of tea for me, and turned away with big tears on her old cheeks; (there were none on mine). And then the doctor came in, with long face, and lowered voice, and told me he was sinking fast—God! as if I did not know that—and poured out some brandy into a glass for me to give him. But I said I would not, rudely, angrily; pushed it away from me; told them he should die in peace, and that they should not torment him—I hated to see that careless indifferent stranger come to gape and croak over him, in his mortal weakness.

So they left me and my old man alone together, we had always loved to be together, hadn't we? The wind rose a little at nightfall, and came sighing, sobbing, keening, about the old eaves and gables, and the snow turned to sleet, and beat and pattered against the panes. It seemed so hard to die on such a night; so hard for a poor bare soul to go shuddering out into the great dark void. I could have let him go from me better, I thought, on some bright warm summer nooning, when you could almost see heaven's gates a long way up in the azure depths.

Gradually he sank into a stupor; He who does all things well, took away from him all knowledge of past, present, and to come; all consciousness of his pains and aches; of his debts and his sorrows, and even of his little pet daughter, kneeling by his bedside, with her head in the counterpane, choking and shaking in her sobs.

The night deepened, waned; the candles flared tall and yellow, and the wind sank: still I knelt on, holding the hand that was ever growing colder, colder, with my eyes riveted on that sunken face, that looked so old, so gray, and so very peaceful: I was learning off every pathetic line and hollow in it; printing it on my icy desolate heart, against the time when I should have but memory left of him.

The breathing had grown fainter, fainter; sometimes it paused quite, for a second or two, then laboured on for a space, intermittent, feeble; the pauses grew longer—longer; the gasps lower—weaker—weaker—then stopped! And about the fourth watch of the night came One into that upper chamber—One that had not been there

before. A great quiet awe stole over me: I rose from my knees very gently, reverently, and bent over him.

"He is gone! " I said to myself—when suddenly the old kind eyes opened once again wide, with an infinite glad surprise in them, as if they saw some pleasant jocund sight—My old man! God grant that it was so! —and then the eyelids closed again very softly, and he was not.

So the family vault of the Lestranges was opened, and the good gray head went down into the dust, whither all heads go at last. I hope they'll bury me with him when I die. I should like that last grand trumpet blare to find us together. And they carried him away—him, that dead coffined weight—ah! not him, not him, really—away from his pretty old house, and his books, and his wretchedest, wretchedest "little lass. " As they bore him slowly under the great elms, beneath whose shade he and I had so often walked, holding sweet converse, the snow fell heavy and thick, whitened the black pall, and sent its feathery, icy flakes against my face, as I walked behind.

I ought to have cried, I suppose, that day; Dolly did; even Mrs. Smith and the other servants did; and I looked at them with a certain stolid surprise. I did not cry; I was not the least inclined; I felt no particular pain or grief, only an infinite, numb apathy. So they bore him through the lych gate, and into the church, and we said the solemn good-bye words to him—he lying there deaf, unheeding of our farewells; and then they laid him in the yawning grave (we standing round), and the snow flakes fell on the coffin-plate, that told how Sir Adrian Lestrangle departed this life on the 30th day of December, 186—. And then we turned away and left him, and I was sorry as one that had no hope.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I remember, I remember
The house where I was born;
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn.
It never came a wink too soon,
Nor brought too long a day,
But now I often wish the night
Had borne my breath away."

WHEN next the sun comes peeping through my little dim-paned window, he will find no Nelly Lestrangle to greet him. He will miss the girl whom he has watched grow up from a little toddling pinafores child, to a fair, tall, comely woman—will miss the happy, foolish innocent face that has smiled back to him across the hay-field, on so many dewy June mornings. Nelly Lestrangle, with her light heart, her tumbledown Spanish castles, and her silly little tender jokes, has gone away, not from that room only, but from the world.

They buried her yesterday in that dull chamber, where Death is holding his carnival among the Lestranges, and have left only a very heavy-hearted Nell Lancaster in her stead.

I am sitting in my father's bedroom, on the floor; by the bed whereon he died, and am kissing it. God has vouchsafed to me to-day the gift of tears. After he was dead, when the warmth was gone out of the heart that would have bled less, had it been colder, when his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him. I had cut off a bit of his hair, and now the sight of the thin gray lock, so sparse, so almost white, recalled to me with such bitter force the head from which it was severed, that he being dead, yet spake. Oh God! is there any verse that ever was penned by mortal fingers that grasps so at the universal sympathies of this whole tearful world, as this one.

"Oh Christ! that it were possible
For one short hour to see
The souls we loved, that they might tell us
What and where they be."

Before, when my old man had gone away from me, though he was beyond the reach of my fond arms, beyond the province of the eye

and the ear, I could yet picture him to myself amongst familiar human surroundings; could imagine him sitting and walking, making his kindly jests, and talking his clever pointed talk; now the vagueness and the doubt rebuffed me.

So far as I had gone with him, he had had a good journey, thank God! for he had parted from me smiling; but alas! that was but a very little way on. I could but take him to the great gates, and send him out into the night, and stand peering with eager aching eyes after him, as he went forth into the blackness alone.

It is afternoon, and, but for the servants, I am alone in the house. Hugh is gone over to Wentworth, whence he is to return later to fetch me, and Dolly is gone. Dolly has been very busy all the morning, going about the house, and picking up a little bit of china here, and a little bit of plate there. She has no particular right to them, although she says very feelingly, that 'poor dear papa' gave them to her, and so of course she cannot bear the idea of their being put up to sale for any dreadful common creatures; but when a house is in the confusion attendant upon an owner lately dead, a little petty larceny is excusable, almost laudable.

Half an hour ago, she set off on a long visit to some of her numerous friends; she made a very pretty exit, crying a little, but not enough to disfigure herself at the railway station, and shaking hands with all the servants. I have cried myself into a state of semi-insensibility; my head is resting on the counterpane, and my lock of hair is lying in silver paper on my lap, when the door opens, and Mrs. Smith says, very gently, "If you please, my lady, Sir Hugh's come back."

If I had thought about it, I should have recollected that there was nobody but myself in the room; but somehow it never occurred to me to take the unfamiliar appellation to myself. Mrs. Smith comes a little further into the room, and repeats a tone or two louder.

"If you please, my lady, Sir Hugh's come and would like to speak to you," I stare up at her, dully scared for a minute; then jump up, throw my arms about the old woman's neck, and lay my head on her kindly bosom.

"Don't call me that!" I say whispering; "don't! I hate it; call me Miss Nell always; do you mind?" Mrs. Smith kisses my swollen face, and strokes my disordered hair; it was homely, but very lovingly done,

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as Sir Thomas More said of the maid Dorothy Collis, who embraced him as he went to execution.

"I'll call you what you like, my dear, in course; but indeed—indeed you should not take on so; it's not right, it is not indeed; it was the Almighty's will as he was took, " she says very shakily, "and, oh dear! he has been worritted a deal, poor gentleman; I don't think you had oughter wish him back! "

"I don't! I don't! " I cry, sobbing hysterically; "I'm not so cruel! do you think I'm a fiend; but I only wish they'd —let me—let me—go to him; it's not wicked to say that is it? "

"Not a bit wicked! " says Mrs. Smith, soothingly, "and so you will in the Lord's good time; so we all shall, I 'ope; and for my part so as we was prepared, I don't much care how soon. " Hugh, manlike, is getting impatient. I hear him calling

"Nell! Nell! "

It is not the same voice that was wont to come ringing up these stairs; it is a younger, stronger, commoner one; the contrast comes coldly home to my heart.

"I don't want to see him, " I say; pitifully to Mrs. Smith, and speaking as if I had a very bad cold in my head; "go and ask him to give me half an hour more. "

Mrs. Smith looks mild disapprobation.

"Nay, my dear, I don't think you had oughter keep him waiting; he's your 'usband, you know, and he raly is as good a gentleman as ever trod shoe-leather; we cannot expect everybody to be like them as is gone. "

I have been rather meek and biddable from my youth up, so I go. Hugh is standing at the foot of the stairs, whistling very softly to himself; it is almost as inveterate a habit with him, as with Mr. Chick.

"What a figure you have made of yourself, you poor little girl! " he says, surveying rather ruefully, the purple-eyed, red-nosed, hollow-cheeked prize that he has acquired.

"I cannot help it! " I say, doggedly. "Do you want me? Mrs. Smith said you did."

"I'd walk on my head from here to Wentworth, if it would do you any good, " he says, disregarding my question, and looking sympathetic, as a really good-natured man would in the presence of a grief which it was equally beyond his power to measure or assuage; "but you really ought not to fret like this, you'll be laid up, and you know it's—it's Godalmighty'swill."

Hugh is very shy of pronouncing his Creator's name, and now does it with a jerk, running the three words into one very rapidly. I don't feel much consoled by the information, and go and sit down listlessly, on the end of the servant's prayer bench. I have eaten nothing all day, and am as weak as a cat.

"What time will you be ready to start? " asks Hugh, seeing that his theological gun has missed fire.

"Oh, must we go yet? " I cry, clasping my hands in despair, "I wanted to bid good-bye to all the old place! "

Hugh looks down and pulls his grizzling moustache.

"The days are so short, you see, " he says "and it takes two hours to get there; I don't want to bring the horses in hot; and mother will be getting anxious if we are not back by dinner time! "

"How soon then? " I ask, giving up the point as I would give up any point to-day.

"Well, as soon as you can pop on your bonnet then. I'll go to the stables and tell him to put the horses to; they're uncommon likely to take cold if they stay there long, for it's as damp as a—" Vault, he was going to say, but it occurred to him, that, under the circumstances, it might sound unfeeling.

I rise and move towards the stairs again, dragging my legs after me.

"Oh, by-the-by, Nell, which would you like to go in? the brougham or the double dog-cart—they are both here? "

"Oh not the dog-cart! " I say with an involuntary gesture of disgust.

"Why? it is not cold! "

"It reminds me of that dreadful day, " I say without thinking. (I somehow attribute all my ills to that day.) I was enough to try the patience of the ten best husbands in Britain, wasn't I? but then I was so miserable.

Sir Hugh's kind, good-natured face clouds a little.

"Those were not the same pair, " he says, "and the cart cannot run away of itself. "

He does not relish the idea of a fourteen mile drive in a stuffy close carriage, with a crying woman; even though she is his bride.

"As you wish, " I say indifferently, "it's all one to me. "

So the dog-cart it is, and into it I get; a limp, nerveless figure, on which a great deal of crape is hung, and over whose face a crape veil falls black and thick as a December night. There has been one of those rapid changes in the weather, which are common in our climate, so rich in unpleasant surprises. The snow is all melted out of the sky, and the bitter wind has whistled and moaned itself away to some other quarter of the earth. The air is as warm as April, and the atmosphere that of a vapour bath.

A dank blue mist hangs over the church-yard. It is not raining, and yet the tombstones are all streaming with wet, and great drops hang from the old ash's naked boughs. I strain my neck back as long as the dim gray tower, and the great dripping yews are in sight.

"Good-bye old dad! " I say to myself over and over again, "good-bye, " and then I cry under my veil, bitterlier than ever.

For the first five miles Hugh leaves me pretty much to my own devices; does not bring God-Almighty's-will to bear on me again; he makes several remarks of a friendly nature to his horses, urging them to steadiness of conduct, and throws out an inquiry or two as to the mode of their entertainment at Lestrange to the groom.

But he holds his tongue as far as the veiled statue beside him is concerned.

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The veiled statue unveils herself presently, and stows away her pocket-handkerchief in her pocket, having exhausted all the tears in her lachrymatory. The lamps are lit, and we go spinning through the darkness—it is quite dark by now. Splash! splash! go the horses' hoofs through the mud; a light twinkles here and there cheerily, from a cottage window. "So shines a good deed in a naughty world." Immediately on perceiving this change in the weather, Hugh passes the reins into his right hand, and puts his left arm round me. I am Sir Hugh's lawful wife now; so this proceeding does not amuse the groom so much as it would have done on that former drive; it tickles him a little however.

"That's right, old woman!" says my husband kindly; "cheer up! what's done cannot be undone; but things are never so bad in this world that they might not be worse."

The near horse shies; the arm is withdrawn, "Steady old boy! steady!"

It is very unwifely of me, but I feel inclined to say Ta to that timid quadruped.

"I suppose, Nell," says Hugh—he thinks that now that the ice is broken, a little cheerful conversation will be highly salutary for me—"I suppose, Nell, that poor Dolly has got to her journey's end by now."

"I suppose so."

"How long is she going to stay there? do you know?"

"No."

"What is she going to do with herself afterwards?"

"I don't know." (My tone said 'I don't care either.')

"Poor girl! it's very sad for her not having a hole or corner to put her head in!"

"She has lots of friends."

"Oh, ay! friends very likely; and people are very glad to have a girl with them for a month, or two even; but one cannot live on one's

friends; that was what she was saying to me this morning. We had a long talk before she went; I don't think I ever was so sorry for any one in my life."

(The objects of compassion which Hugh meets when'er he takes his walks abroad are few apparently.)

"Did she tell you what her plans were? "

"Well, no! I don't think she had made up her mind; she came to ask my advice, poor thing! and she seemed so cut up too, about this—this—affair, " says Hugh, rather at a loss for an expression, and jerking his head vaguely in the direction of my father's death.

"Awfully! " I say, ironically; "I don't suppose she'll ever get over it. " Hugh does not heed my sneer. When once he is off on a train of thought, he runs along it like a mad dog; turning neither to the right nor to the left.

"Do you know what my advice was, Nell? I suppose I ought to have asked you first, but I felt sure of not meeting with much opposition from you—the old lady is the only difficulty; she is so ratchetty now and then, and always hates new faces, too! "

"What was your advice? " I ask, startled.

"Why to come and keep house with us, till she marries—that'll be sure not to be long first! "

"Oh! " say I, blankly, and my tone is not exultant. Hugh was right just now; there is no state of things so bad but that it may not be worse.

"Seems such a natural arrangement! own sister! —parents dead! —no home! " says Hugh, becoming ejaculatory, and not quite so certain of my approbation as he was five minutes ago.

"It was very kind of you, " I say, gently.

I feel that I am receiving what he intended as a pleasant surprise for me, rather ungraciously.

"Oh, no! not at all! she is a great ally of mine; she has always been a good friend to me, even in the days when you used to snub me, Nell! "

"Yes. "

"Of course, I don't mean to say that my principle motive in asking her, was not that I thought you would be pleased to have such a nice companion, and one that you have been used to all your life too; mother is all very well in her way, of course—I don't mean to say a word against her—but I should not think that you and she would be likely to have many ideas in common, and of course I cannot be with you all day; there's the farm, you know, and hunting five days a week, and—and—" says poor Hugh, rather discomfited at the ill-success of his little benevolent scheme, and trying to make out the best case he can for himself.

"It was very good of you! " I say again very gratefully; "and what answer did she make? "

Hugh looks rather foolish.

"Oh, poor girl! why I really think she hardly knew what she was doing; she cried and wanted to go down on her knees to thank me, only of course I could not stand that; " (wretched as I am, I laugh grimly to myself, as I picture the little tableau—Dolly going gracefully down on her knees, and poor Hugh in dire confusion hauling her up again; I think if she had reflected that it would in all probability go back to me, she would have refrained from that little bit of melodrama) "and that of course it was a great boon to a poor homeless girl like her, and that she dare say'd she should not trouble us long. I don't know what she meant by that, I'm sure, unless she has got somebody in her eye—and—and that she'd come, I suppose! "

I say "Oh! " again, and the subject drops.

I feel that it would seem unnatural in me to object, and I could as soon fly in the air as express any elation at the intelligence. My legs feel very stiff, and I am weary, as Hugh lifts me down at Wentworth Hall door.

Last time I saw that door, Dick was leaning against it—I don't even think of Dick to-day somehow. I follow Hugh into the library, where lights are blazing and the curtains are drawn, and a tall old lady in

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black—she has put on complimentary mourning—receives me in her arms, and kissing me, says with prim stateliness, but very kindly withal, “Welcome home, my dear daughter!”

Alas! she is the only person whose daughter I am now.

CHAPTER XIV.

THEY tell us, don't they, that one of the mercifullest dispensations of Providence is our facility for forgetting—the ease and quickness with which we get over things? To me it seems that what points the sting of every grief, is the thought that a time will come when we shall grieve no more. It is terrible enough, God wot, for a person to drop out of our lives; but to drop out of our hearts too. Ah, poor dead ones! is not that hard?

As long as their memory is with us fresh and green—as long as it lives with us, as they themselves lived with us, coming in and going out, in the house and in the street, in talk and in silence, on Sundays and on week-days—so long do we seem to keep a little portion of them with us; they do not seem quite gone away from us.

But the same thing happened to us all. Strive and resolve as we may to keep our sorrow fresh and new and glossy, it is all to no purpose; it grows insensibly old and stale and shabby, like the crape round our hats. Have not you, oh friends, before now, seeing some acquaintance who had just issued out of great tribulation, laughing and talking, apparently unchanged—have not you said within yourself—how unfeeling he is! how different I should be!

And lo! the apple of your eye is taken away from you, and in a week or two you also are laughing and talking—the river of your life flows on smooth, unruffled, as if that new-made grave were razed out of creation.

“Out of sight, out of mind,” is true to a certain extent of all of us. We cannot be always thinking of what we never see: that is the very thing that makes it so difficult for us to rest our minds on heaven, and heaven's high King; we cannot see them, and so we but feebly, transiently realize them.

The people we see, who talk to us, and we to them, whom we can hear and touch and feel, gradually fill more and more of that vacant space: the overpowering force of time saps our woes, as a little wave, plashing through long aeons, wears and hollows at last the great granite rock.

But oh! we don't forget, really! I don't mean you to think that. The wound heals over slightly; we could not all walk about with great gaping gashes, could we? The world's work could not get done if we did; but beneath the surface that looks all fair and even, there is a great dull ache going on always—an ache that takes the taste out of our life's savoury meats, and makes us call our short day all too long.

A month has gone by—a wintry, sleety, dreary month. People have got tired of talking of Sir Hugh Lancaster's wedding, and Sir Adrian Lestrangle's death. Other men and women have been wed and died since; and new subjects have supplanted those two, which were of intensest interest to but one or at most two people. And there has been a sale at Lestrangle; the old oak chairs and tables have been knocked down to the highest bidder; scattered among the neighbouring sons of Manchester and Liverpool: and the old rooms look strange and piteous and unfurnished without them.

And greasy Jews—the offscouring of the earth—(my one point of sympathy with the *moyen âge* barbarians is their loathing and maltreatment of the accursed Israelitish dog)—have been prowling about, trading, as is their wont, on the miseries and weaknesses of poor humanity. And Hugh, good old fellow, has bought the old leathern arm-chair for me: I am sitting in it now; I hope I shall die in it.

I have been transplanted from Lestrangle to Wentworth, and the transplantation has not killed me. I am a hardier plant than I thought I was. I don't cry all day, by any means, and I laugh now and then when anything in my husband or his belongings strikes me in a ridiculous light, which is not seldom. I am hungry and eat, I sleep sound, I still have likes and dislikes, I make jokes occasionally; I squabble about every two days with my mamma-in-law, when she tries to give me lectures on deportment, and *le bon Dieu*, still gives me energy to snub Hugh as seemeth good unto me. Do you suppose from this that I accepted my fate meekly, that I was beginning to get reconciled to it? Not I!

My father's death I should have got over in time perhaps: it is natural that parents should go before their children, and I might have got to think of him without torture, with a gentle eternal regret and "*sehning*," as the Germans say. I doubt even that; doubt my ever forgetting my old dad even if I had had Dick to kiss away my

tears, and supply the place of all other loves by his great passionate one. Now that the first *éclat* and excitement of my sacrifice were over—now that I knew for certain that I had slain myself in vain, knew that he for whom I had been offered up was sleeping with his fathers beneath the chancel of Lestrange, never to be wakened by my loudest, piercingest cries, then my misery rose up before me, huge, unnatural, gigantic; terribler “than ever woman wore.” I was like Jonah when his gourd died down. I said, “I do well to be angry, even unto death.” “Why,” I cried, “was I to be picked out from among all women, to be pre-eminently wretched?”

The little worthless earthenware pitcher, picked a quarrel with the potter who framed it. I did not love Hugh one bit; it is not easy to love two men at once; to tell you the truth, I did not try much, sometimes I loathed him. And yet he was very good to me, as good as could be. I verily believe that he loved me as much as he could love any created thing; it was not his fault, poor fellow, that he was not made of the finest porcelain, but was only good, useful, ugly Delf. He was not to blame that Providence had made him a little, dark, middle-aged baronet, instead of a great beautiful fair dragoon.

I am sure that he appreciated my varied excellences, and even ruggednesses, as much as man could; and was fully alive to the advantage he had gained in having a pretty young white face opposite to him every day at dinner, instead of an old yellow ugly one. He was a most loving husband; horribly, needlessly, irksomely loving, I said to myself. One has not much power of simulation or dissimulation at nineteen; but I did my best to hide my disrelish for my lord, and to receive his blandishments with as good a grace as I could.

I was his chattel as much as his pet lean-headed bay mare, and I felt that he had justice on his side. If he might not insinuate his arm round my waist, round whose waist might he? Sometimes I will confess to you that I wished he would transfer his amities to some other person, even if it were the cook. I’m sure I should not have been jealous. All Sir Hugh’s other servants, if they disliked their situations, or got tired of them, might give warning and leave; but I, however wearied I might get of mine, could never give warning, could never leave. I was a fixture for life. So I said to myself sometimes, and ground my teeth, and snarled like a caged tiger.

I had indulged a mild vague hope that the very words of the marriage ceremony read over me, would have a cabalistic charm to prevent my ever thinking of any man but Sir Hugh, after we were man and wife. I had heard that only very bad wicked women ever cared for anybody but their husbands after they were married, and I hoped I was not a very bad wicked woman.

However, I discovered pretty soon with some chagrin that I must reckon myself among that naughty band; that I was not one of those "who love their lords; " not "a matron of Cornelia's mien. " I found that I thought of Dick infinitely more; more regretfully, passionately, longingly, now that I was Lady Lancaster, and it was criminal of me so to think, than I had done as Nelly Lestrangle, when it was only unwise and unworldly. Nor was this mere womanly perversity, hankering after the unattainable; nor did it spring from any idea that it was rather fine to be immoral. I thought of him because I had nothing else pleasant to think of. The one person who had ever halved my heart with him was gone from me.

I hated to think of my father, not having that living faith accorded to some, which enables them to say from their hearts, that their dead ones are "not dead but gone before. " My father was dead to me, dead as the old dog who died the other day licking my hand. I knew I never should see him again.

How did I know whither he was gone; how did I know whether he had gone to any good place; and if he had, what right had I to think that I should ever rejoin him there? I did not believe in any heaven with sufficient strength to make me strive very strenuously to attain it.

Life seemed to me a great vast chaos, through which men stumbled and tottered to a big black pit at the end. So I thought on the forbidden theme all the day, and sometimes all the night; and truly there was not much at Wentworth to distract my thoughts. A lap-dog would have thought my existence paradise; for I had plenty of the best to eat, and big fires to bask in; but for myself, I thought it a very dull gehenna.

All through the wintry morning I sat on a gilt chair, clad from head to foot in thickest silk and blackest crape, in the yellow drawing-room, every stick of whose ugly furniture spoke to me of him; while my mother-in-law knitted socks for her beloved son—she was a

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thrifty old soul, and would fain have had me do likewise—and narrated to me apochryphal tales of Hugh's extreme beauty in infancy; thrilling anecdotes of his childhood, and of how he caught the measles; of his habits and customs at various periods of his history; of how often he had broken his collar-bone, &c., &c.

In the afternoon I either went behind the fat coach-horses, to pay solemn calls to neighbouring matrons, accompanied as before, by our mamma, or else, when it was not a hunting day, I potted about the premises with Hugh, heard his horses' pedigrees, and thought, with a frosty chill at my heart, of those other saunters at Lestrangle, about shabbier stables, with the dear old man who was not.

Sometimes, but very rarely, I managed to shirk out by myself, to put on the dowdiest cloak and hat I could find, to take off my ring, and dawdle and wander and scramble about the park, and be Nelly Lestrangle—in my own eyes at least—once again.

In the evenings, we two women stitched and interchanged amicable nothings or mild sparrings, while Hugh, having bestowed on me such post-coenal caresses as he felt inclined, went to sleep, and mostly snored.

We were so sitting one evening after dinner—Lady Lancaster, senior, click-clacking away at that eternal knitting; Sir Hugh not quite asleep yet, but reading the Times as a narcotic; and Lady Lancaster, junior, toiling unlovingly at a smoking-cap for her master, and glancing now and then from him to his mother, from the lean grizzling head and bristles to the yellow front and wrinkles, and crying out to herself—

"Oh, how sick I am of you both. Oh, if I could but get away—oh, if I only could!"

Then Hugh spoke.

"Mother, do you recollect M'Gregor?"

"M'Gregor, my dear boy; what M'Gregor? —there are so many M'Gregors. There is your poor father's friend, Sir Malcolm, and there's General M'Gregor?"

"No, no," interrupts her son, "none of those old fogies. I mean a big, good-looking fellow that was here last year. Don't you remember?"

"To be sure," says mamma, calmly; "he spilt a cup of coffee over my lavender satin—I had to have the breadth taken out; and I remember remarking that he seemed very attentive to Dorothea LeStrange. Yes, I remember the young man perfectly."

"Do you happen to recollect the number of his regiment?" says Hugh, who is widely, brilliantly awake by now.

"—th Dragoons," interpose I, breathlessly; "what about him?"

"Nothing, darling," says Benedick, looking at me with lazy rapture, "only I see it's ordered to India."

"Ordered to India!"

I rose and rushed hastily out of the room, very nearly falling foul of the butler, who was bringing in tea, and disconcerting that grave functionary considerably.

Next day, Sir Hugh and his mother went to dine and sleep at a house in the neighbourhood. My deep mourning of course excused me from accompanying them, and a proud woman was I when their backs were fairly turned. I had begged and entreated of my mother-in-law not to stay, or let Hugh stay at home on my account; and she had commended my unselfishness, and had driven off in high good humour with "her boy."

"Thank God!" said I, standing at the hall-door, and watching the carriage lamps go twinkling down the dusky avenue. Then I returned slowly to the saloon, and let my countenance fall into any woe-begone dejected curves it chose, there being nobody by to remark upon them.

"Ordered to India—ordered to India!" Those three words had been dwelling in my ears for the last twenty-four hours, ceaselessly; the gilt clock on the mantelpiece seemed to be ticking them now. "Going to India to have his young life scorched away, and I should never see him again." It was not that I should not see him again for a year, or for two, or for twenty years, but—never. I should never know how, why, or for what other fairer, lovable woman he had deserted me.

An overpowering, mad longing seized me to go to him to ask him why he had been so cruel to me, to ask him to take me with him to that far sultry land. What did I care how wicked I was? My old man would never know it, "For he was chill to praise or blame. " It seemed to me, then, that the best thing we can do in this grievous world is to snatch whatever present bliss we may, seeing that the past is all torture and the future all nothingness. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die, " seemed to me the profoundest philosophy then. "If there is eternal justice somewhere, " said I to myself, "why is my punishment so much heavier than my sins? I ask for so little; I don't expect, don't ask to be happy—I only beg for exemption from bitterest, sharpest pain; I only ask for an easy death and quick annihilation. Oh, to lay down my head in the kindly dust—not in a coffin, a heavy, stifling, dreadful coffin—but in the fresh-scented, dark-brown earth, and with 'life's fitful fever' for ever cooled, sleep on and on, till my body 'returns to the earth as it was, ' and my spirit—ah, can it sleep? "

The fire burnt cheerily; the wax candles shed a soft lustre round them; the old china on mantel-shelf and table and cabinet looked comfortable and snug and homelike; but I felt stifled, choking. I went to the window, opened it, and stepped out into the verandah. A great gust of rain-laden wind comes driving roughly against me, the French window behind me bangs to, and I stand out on the wet flags, and watch the black clouds go scudding, hurrying across the sky, for the moon is up and gives me light. It was not cold, and I felt to breathe freer, leaning my face among the wet ivy, that climbed and twisted round the further pillar of the verandah.

"It was here he kissed me; it was here he took me in his arms, " said I to myself, nestling my head among the dripping green. "I thought I was going to spend my life with him, and now I am alone, alone for evermore! Great God—how unbearable! "

Suddenly there comes a lull between two rainbursts; the moon comes sweeping out from behind a great cloud shoulder; the Portugal laurel beside me shakes and rustles; and from behind it a man steps out suddenly—steps out into the moonlit gravel walk, where the pebbles are glittering like so many diamonds.

CHAPTER XV.

NEED I tell you who the man was? For a second, I did not know myself; for a second, I stood paralyzed by terror; then he came close up to me, and I knew him; and a great flood of wicked, wonderful joy streamed into my soul and nearly drowned it; as I looked up at the young giant with the haggard, beautiful, angry face that was stooping over me.

"I have been prowling about like a thief or a poacher, " he says, harshly; "I have watched that fellow, your husband, out; I was determined I would see you before I went. " The cloud rack blots out the moon again; it is very dark.

"Is it you, Dick, really? " I say, faltering, and then I push back the window, and the light from fire and candle flashes on him, as he stands there, wet to the skin, big, shaggy, miserable. My heart goes out, with a great yearning pity to him; "come in, " I say, hastily; "you're so wet; don't stand out there! " I step back into the warm, scented room, and he, after hanging back a minute, as if irresolute, follows me. We give each other no polite greeting; we stand by the crackling, cheery fire blaze, and say nothing for a while; only we look into each other's eyes, with passionate, desperate longing across the mighty chasm that yawns between us. At length Dick says groaningly, as if the words were wrenched from him—

"Oh, Nell! Nell! why did you do this? why did you jilt me when I loved you so? "

The blood rushed boiling, surging into my cheeks and forehead and throat. I was a mean-spirited woman; till he said that, I had absolutely forgotten his ill-treatment of me.

"How dare you ask that? " I cried vehemently, "you, who have blighted all my life for me; you, who have been crueller to me than ever man was to woman before; you, who never sent me word or sign, all through those weary six months; you, who had not even the bare civility to answer the letters I wrote to you in my misery! "

I stopped, suffocated.

"What—do—you mean? " said Dick, very slowly; he was spreading his broad hands to the blaze, and his drenched pilot coat was steaming in the warmth; at my upbraidings, no remorse, only intensest surprise came into his face. "I never had but one letter from you, and that one you most solemnly adjured me not to answer. Here it is! I have carried it about with me, night and day, ever since I got it. "

He put his hand into his breast pocket, and pulled out a letter. I snatched it eagerly; it was like my handwriting, but it was not it; it was neater, carefuller, more ornate. I turned to the signature; there was none; then I read it through: —

"My dearest, -It seems so odd and so pleasant, sitting down to write to you; but oh! I'm grieved to have to tell you that this first letter must also be the last; at least for ever so long. Don't be angry with me, but I told papa all about you; you know how I love him, and I could not bear to keep anything from him. Well! he was very very angry at first; would not hear of it at all; said it was all nonsense, and that we had both behaved shamefully; but at last, after a great deal of trouble and begging, I got him to come round so far as to say, that if we both remained in the same mind for a year, he would then listen to us; only he stipulated that we must neither see nor write to each other during the year. I did my very best, as you may imagine, to make him chance his decision, but all to no purpose! It seems a little hard, doesn't it? and I cannot help crying a little sometimes, when I think of neither hearing from, nor seeing you for so long; but, after all, a year will soon be gone, and just think how happy we shall be then. Good-bye, my darling; God bless you!

"Ever your own.

"P. S.—I adjure and implore you not to answer this: I beg it of you as a proof of your love. Papa would be sure to see the letter, and then we should be in worse case than we are now even. Good-bye again, my own darling. "

"I never wrote a word of it, " said I, compelling myself to speak very calmly, though I clutched hold of a chair back for support. "Never; it's all a forgery; this is Dolly's doing! "

"What? " said he, gasping, and his strong frame staggered as under a mighty blow; ". you never wrote this! "

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"Never," said I, very solemnly. "I wrote you plenty of other letters to tell you how much I loved you, and to ask you why you never wrote to me, as you promised to do?"

"And I never got one of them," he said; and as he spoke, the blood retreated from his lips, and left them livid.

We stared at one another blankly; we were as if stunned.

Presently he asked, hoarsely, "What made her do it?"

"Oh, I see it, I see it all!" I groaned, wringing my hands. "She was determined I should marry him," (I could not mention his hated name), "and I've done it; I have fallen into the trap she laid for me! Oh! I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!"

I burst into loud sobbing, and throwing myself on the ottoman, buried my head in the cushions.

"She-devil," said Dick, grinding his white teeth, like a wild beast in his rage and agony, "I wish to God I had her here now, I'd tear her limb from limb, though she is a woman; by G— I would!"

"If my heartiest, bitterest curse," said I, vindictively, "can do her any harm, she has the comfort of knowing that she has got it;" and then I flung myself on the floor, and wept afresh—wept till I was exhausted, and till my eyes had nearly disappeared from their situations.

He, meanwhile, stood with his elbow on the mantel-piece, watching me, with his angry, hopeless, passionate eyes; he did not attempt to give me any comfort; he could not give what he had not got, poor fellow! and besides was not I another man's wife? It was Sir Hugh's business to dry my tears, not his.

"And so it's all a mistake! all a mistake!" he said at last, very brokenly, as if to himself; and the gilt clock changed its tune, and went ticking on, "all a mistake, all a mistake!"

Then I rose from off the floor, and went and sat down on the ottoman again, and forgot Sir Hugh's existence altogether. The rainy wind still blustered and wailed and stormed outside; but yet the storm within our breasts was mightier.

"I cannot stand it any longer, " Dick said, vehemently, clenching his hand, and bringing it down like a sledge hammer on the marble slab. "I must go, or I shall make a beast of myself. Nell! I'm sailing for India to-morrow; say one kind word to me before I go. Oh, Nell! Nell! you belonged to me before you belonged to him, damn him! "

Looking into his haggard, beautiful, terrible face, I forgot all I should have remembered; forgot virtue, and honour, and self-respect; my heart spoke out to his. "Oh, don't, go! " I cried, running to him, "don't you know how I love you? for my sake stay; I cannot live without you! "

I clasped both hands on his rough coat sleeve, and my bowed head sank down upon them.

"Do you suppose I can live in England and see you belonging to another man? " he asked, harshly; "the world is all hell now, as it is; but that would be the blackest, nethermost hell! No, let me go, " he said, fiercely, pushing me away from him roughly, while his face was writhen and distorted.

"If you go, " I said in my insanity, throwing myself into his arms, "I'll go too. Oh! for God's sake take me with you. "

He strained me to his desolate heart, and we kissed each other wildly, vehemently: none came between us then. Then he tried to put me away from him.

"My darling, " he said, "you don't know what you're saying; do you think I'm such a brute as to be the ruin of the only woman I ever loved? " and his deep voice was sorely shaken as he spoke.

But I would not be put away: I clung about his neck, in my bitter pain.

"I'd rather go to hell with you, than to heaven with him! " I cried, blasphemously. "Oh, don't leave me behind you! You're all I have in the world now. Oh, take me, take me with you! "

My hair fell in its splendid ruddy billows over his great shoulder, and my arms were flung about the stately pillar of his throat.

He set his teeth hard, and drew in his breath; it was a tough ordeal.

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"I won't," he said, hoarsely; "for God's sake stop tempting me. I'd sooner cut your throat than take you. Do you think it would be loving you to bring you down to a level with the scum of the earth? Oh, Nell! Nell! you ought to be my good angel. Don't tempt me to kill my own soul and yours!"

The reproachful anguish of his tones smote me like a two-edged sword. I said no more; I lay passive as a log in the arms that must so soon loose me for ever, while the madness died slowly, frostily out of me.

"I'm very wicked, I know," I whispered piteously; "you don't hate me, Dick, do you, for wanting to go with you?"

"Hate you! my poor pretty darling; if you could but look into my heart, and see what it is without you!"

Great tears are standing in his honest, tender, agonized eyes—tears that don't disgrace his manhood much, I think.

"Go now," I whisper, huskily, "I can bear it. God bless you, darling!"

"My little Nell! My own little snow-drop!" he cries, and then he kisses me heart-brokenly; and as he so kisses and clasps me, a great blackness comes over my eyes, and I swoon away in his arms.

When I come back to life—come back with trouble, and sighings, and pain, I find myself lying in my long heavy black draperies on the sofa; find the candles burning low, and the fire nearly out; find that he is gone, and that I am alone—alone for evermore!

CHAPTER XVI.

HUGH and his mamma returned next day; the red and brown leaves were whirling and dancing about, and the tree-arms were creaking and grinding. Standing listlessly by my boudoir window, about four o'clock, I see the family coach and the bays coming with slow majesty though the park.

Hugh in his brown great-coat driving; our parent uprighter than one of her own knitting needles, and her *femme de chambre* inside; the valet and the footman in the dicky. Here they all are! welcome, welcome home! I had spent the last night, lying all along upon the earth, as David did when he was interceding for the life of his little son. I was interceding for the sparing of no life; I was but interceding for the taking away of my own. The rough west wind kept dashing the ivy sprays against the window pane, and I lay with my face buried in the deep piled carpet, while my darling went away from me through the night; went away forlornly, in his soaked pilot coat, with his dripping golden hair, and his true desolate heart.

As for Dolly, I had made up my mind about her. She had sown, and she was about to reap; she had laboured, and she was about to enter upon the reward of her labours.

"No! that she shall not! so help me God! " I cry out in my rage and pain, and the dying fire gives one sleepy flicker of surprise at my vehemence. I would go to Hugh, and would tell him all. I had been dishonest to him all along; I would be honest now; I had been sailing under false colours; now I would run up my own black pirate flag. I would go to him, and tell him all my little bitter story; I would hide no detail; gloss over none of my own vast wickedness. I would tell him how I had thrown myself into that other man's arms, and begged him with tears and prayers earnestest than ever mother sent up in behalf of her dying child, to take me away with him, to make me utterly vile and enormously happy. And I would also tell him—for to this, that other anecdote would be but the necessary preface, of my sister's ingenious and newly discovered accomplishment of imitating her neighbour's handwriting; an accomplishment which would have twisted her graceful neck a hundred years ago.

Hugh would turn me out of doors of course. I was fully prepared for that; I should not think it the least severe of him. I could see the old

woman sweeping away her stiff lavender satin from contact with me, and looking at me with her stern Puritan eyes, as the Pharisees long ago, under the blue Palestine sky, looked at the woman, to whom our dear Lord Christ said, "Neither do I condemn thee!" I should be turned out of doors, and should have to go about begging my my bread, in greenish rags and a whine.

There was almost a relief in the idea; it would be a fit expiation for my crime. Moreover, what hardships, what ignominy, what painfullest, lingeringest death, would not I have embraced laughing, to have baulked Dolly of the pay for which she had so diligently served her master, the Devil. Cowardly, chicken-hearted woman as I was—and there were few more so between the three seas, —terrifiedly as I had always shrunk from physical pain; in that first frenzy of agonized hate, I would have hung all day beneath an Eastern sky, nailed hand and foot to a cross, while soul and body parted slowly—slowly—in unimagined anguish, would have been sawn asunder, stoned, burnt, readily, yea, most joyfully, if thereby I could have purchased for myself the power to be fitly revenged on her who had turned the jocund garden of my young life into a desolate wilderness.

"I will tell him to-day—to-morrow." I say to myself, as I stand drumming with my fingers on the sill, and watching my own fine carriage, the carriage for which I have paid the longest price ever carriage fetched, sweeping dignifiedly up to my own Hall door. Hugh helps his mother out dutifully—"my boy" is a good son—and then I hear him coming running upstairs three steps at a time.

"Well, old girl, how are you? Why did not you come down to meet us? I was looking out for you at the Hall door."

"I—I—don't know, I'm sure," I say, feeling horribly guilty, "I never thought of it."

"Very glad to get home again," says Hugh, pulling off his dogskin gloves, and precipitating himself into a minute cane arm-chair; for, if you remark, men always select the smallest chair they can find to deposit their persons upon. "I wish my neighbours all the good in the world, but I don't seem to care how little I see of them now-a-days."

"Don't you?" with a feeble smile.

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"Next time anyone invites me to his house, I think I shall say 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come, ' eh, Nell'" (I have turned a wife out of doors, and therefore I cannot come, will be a more valid excuse, I think bitterly). "I say, Nell, what do you say to running downstairs, and saying something civil to the old lady; I suppose it would be a proper attention, wouldn't it? and old people are such sticklers for their dignity. "

"Oh, yes—oh, to be sure—I was forgetting!" I cry, and I turn to go and greet my "mother," while Hugh follows me.

We find the old dowager sitting in the library; she has not yet laid aside her toga, and is reading her letters.

"I hope you have had a pleasant visit," I say, rather timidly.

"Charming, my dear, charming!" (rustling her letter, and giving me a fond but prickly kiss. It is a dreadful thing living in the house with two moustaches nearly related to you, I find). My version of the little touching hymn to our mammas, that we all commit to memory in early life would be

"Who ran to help me when I fell,
And kissed the place and stabbed it well,

My mother. " "They always arrange their parties so nicely, no mixtures; one never runs any risk there of having any of these nouveaux riches forced willy nilly upon one; the dear Bishop, and Lord and Lady Brandreth—oh, by-the-by, Lady Brandreth asked a great deal about you, was so sorry to miss the opportunity of making your acquaintance; we must positively return her call next week, my dear. "

"Yes, certainly, if you wish. " (By next week, I shall have assumed the greenish rags and the whine.)

I did not tell Hugh on that day, nor on the day after, nor on the day after that. Do not we all know, how without having faltered in our resolution to do a disagreeable thing, we keep putting it off, from one day to another. And meanwhile, the said excellent Hugh pursued the even tenor of his way, doing his duty to God and to man, according to his own ideas of what those duties were. Went to

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church and read "Bell's Life" on Sundays; hunted, and drained, and liquid-manured, and steam-ploughed on week days.

As for the little tiffs in his seraglio—for little tiffs there were even in those early days, little tiffs there must always be, when an old woman and a young one hold divided sway—as long as they were not obtruded on his notice, he treated them with the sublime indifference with which Zeus, the cloud compeller, resting on the topmost peak of Olympus, or going to have a snug dinner with the Ethiopians, might have treated a squabble between those two arrant shrews, cow-eyed Here, and gray-eyed Athene.

If my eyes were red, why it was the east wind, or a touch of influenza. If I did not talk, why he concluded philosophically that I had nothing to say, or at least nothing to say on the subject that he was wont to delight in. For be it known that Sir Hugh was in the habit of keeping a hobby horse, saddled and bridled in his mind's stable; and on this docile animal he frequently cantered up and down, and took healthful exercise. As often as not, this hobby horse was some pet grievance, which went to sleep and underwent decent burial, as long as the hunting and training and liquid manuring were in full force, but was resurrectionized whenever they were found insufficient to employ all the powers of his intellect.

At present the grievance was a projected railway, that was to intersect a part of his property. It was to run only for about a mile and a half through one or two outlying farms, and it was of no earthly disadvantage to him or his, and he knew it; and yet to hear him talk, you would have imagined that it involved the ruin of the whole Lancastria Gens.

"It is too bad!" he is saying now, in a quasi-injured voice, as he sits cracking walnuts at his comfortable dinner table; "one cannot call a foot of one's property one's own now-a-days; one can never be safe from having one's land cut up by these rascally projectors, for their beastly lines that nobody wants."

"Disgraceful!" echoes the acquiescent Dowager, who like lovely Thais, sits beside him, with her head unlike lovely Thais, I imagine, crowned with one of those weird erections of black velvet and steel that old women delight in. "I suppose it is all these dreadful Radicals; I'm sure I don't know what the country is coming to; I

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suppose they will bring their horrid railways through one's drawing-room next. "

"It's such a confounded swindle! " pursues Hugh, applying the nutcrackers viciously to a walnut as if it had been a director's head; "the merest bubble! only people are such fools; they will be taken in, try as one may to open their eyes; and if they do get it—and they won't get it so easy as they think, I can tell them—it will never pay them sixpence in the pound. "

"Won't it, dear? " say I, starting into sudden interest, for I imagined that my husband addressed his last remark more particularly to me; but I am mistaken, it is only that having finished his walnuts, his eyes are gazing straight before him, and consequently, unavoidably take me in in their range of vision.

"Don't you remember, mother, " he goes on, after a few minutes devoted to sipping claret, bringing his eyes to bear on his mamma, and thereby putting his wife off guard; "don't you remember, they were talking about this line once before, five years or so ago. There was some sense in it then, because the Tadcaster and Milton branch was not open then; but when that was opened it did away with all need for this—for that—I mean, don't you see? "

He ends, for he perceives that the relative pronouns are getting too many for him.

"These horrid companies get everything their own way now-a-days! I declare it is quite shocking! it seems to me that no one can do anything for themselves in these days, but must have a company to help them. We shall be having praying companies, and going to bed companies soon. "

Our prophetic parent ceases and adjusts her diadem, the point of which is veering gently round towards her left ear.

"Lord — made such a capital speech in the House yesterday, upon these infernal railways; shows 'em up so completely, brings 'em down to chapter and verse, don't you know. I don't care what any one says, " pursues Sir Hugh, looking round on his harem with a determined air, "but I stick to it, that he is the best speaker they've got now; out and out, out and out, I say. "

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"Ah! " says the senior occupant of the seraglio, deferentially, "won't you read it to us, dear Hugh? at least any part of it that you think we could understand; we should like it so much, should not we, Nelly? "

I again start and blush; I always am starting and blushing of late, and say very nervously, "Oh, yes, to be sure dear—so much—oh do! "

So we migrate to the drawing-room, and Ariel, alias Tomkins, having fetched to-day's "Times," dear Hugh begins to read through two and a half columns of statements and statistics, and representations, all gilded by the lambent glow of Lord —'s wit. Meanwhile "mamma" having assisted her spectacles to mount her long nose, draws her parish bag towards her, and begins to clothe the naked "hear, hear's" and "cheers," and asks the reader is he sure he is not tired, begs him not to make himself hoarse, and offers to get black currant lozenges for him.

I work too, and do my best to keep my attention somewhere within a mile of those big sheets; to laugh and express surprise and horror at the right places; not to laugh where I ought to express horror, not to express horror where I ought to laugh; and by dint of care and always taking my cue from the dowager, I succeed admirably. I could not sleep that night for the wind; it kept roaring so, and groaning in the great Scotch fir close to my bed-room windows. It shook the window frames, and came banging with impotent fury against the stout stone walls.

That was a blowy time; many and many a coast was strewn with wrecks and stranded vessels.

"What an awful night! " my mother-in-law had said, as we came up the deep carpeted stairs to bed, "how thankful we ought to be, my dear, that we have no one dear to us at sea. "

(Oh yes, so thankful, of course.) What did it matter to us that the "Euryalus" sailed from Cork for India four days ago, with the —th Dragoons on board. God help that poor ship to-night, labouring through a wintry sea, with the great greenish-gray waves, with their angry white crests towering high above her mast-heads! God help the one passenger that for me that ship contains! The man in the drenched pilot coat, with the set white face, that day and night I see so plain, that I shall see when the damps and dews of death are coming dankly down upon my own.

Cometh Up as a Flower, Volume II

The wind lulls every now and then for a minute or two, to gather fresh strength for the onset; then comes tearing, howling, shrieking like a hundred lost spirits over the wintry wolds. Oh God! he'll be drowned! he'll be drowned! perhaps he is drowned already! perhaps the crabs and scrawls, and noisome, shapeless sea beasts are already gnawing at the heart what beat with such passionate agony against mine a week ago.

Towards morning the hurricane moderates, and I fall asleep heavily, and dream confusedly of churchyards, and of my father as alive again, while yet I know somehow all the while that he is dead—of tombs and drowned men. I sleep on late, and my eyelids are purple, and my eyes look as if they had been put in with a dirty finger, when I go down late—a great crime at Wentworth—to breakfast.

"I hope you have not waited; I'm so sorry!" I say apologetically, as I make my tardy entrance.

"I think, my dear, that it would be as well if you could try and be down for family prayers," says Lady Lancaster, stiffly; "it is a bad example for the servants when the mistress is absent, and it is no great hardship to be dressed by nine o'clock; at least it used not to be considered so in my young days."

"Come, come, mother, we must not be too hard upon her," says Hugh, taking my hand fondly, "she is not so tough as we old stagers are; and the wind kept her awake, poor little woman! she is half asleep still, isn't she?"

To prevent any wrangling over my unprayerful spirit, I betake myself to my letters, which are lying in a little heap beside my plate. My correspondence is not of much interest generally. The first that I take up has a very broad black edge, ostentatiously broad, like the Pharisees' phylacteries. I look at the hand-writing, frown, tear it open, and read. It does not take long reading.

"My dear Nelly, —As you and dear Hugh, to whom I can never be sufficiently grateful, have been so kind as to offer me a home, I write to ask if you will allow me to take shelter there, early next week. I trust that my coming will be no annoyance to dear Lady Lancaster, but indeed I shall try hard to be in nobody's way.

"Your affectionate sister,

"DOROTHEA LESTRANGE. "

The evil day has come then; the match must be put to the train of gunpowder, which is to blow the reputation of the Lestranges, and the domestic peace and honour of the Lancasters into the air. Shortly after breakfast I go and knock, with trembling knuckles, at the door of Hugh's snugery, where he and his bailiff hold their Witenagemotes, and transact the affairs of the Wentworth nation.

"May I come in, Hugh? "

"Come in! of course you may! "

I enter.

"What do you mean by knocking, Nell? have you forgotten that uncommon cold day, not so long ago, when I endowed you with all my worldly goods? I did not make any exception in favour of this sanctum, did I? "

"I wanted to speak to you, " I say, coming over to the table, with my eyes glued to the carpet.

"All right! fire away! only come a bit closer to the fire, and don't stand there looking like a little undertaker's assistant. "

"I have heard from Dolly! "

"Oh! we shall have to have your tongue slit like a magpie's, Nell, to make you talk a bit faster; she's coming, I suppose. "

"She wants to come next week. "

"Poor Dolly! I'm sure I shall be very glad to see her; and I suppose you have come to talk about what rooms she is to have, and that sort of thing; but you had better settle all that with the old lady; she'll be fit to be tied, if she is not taken into council. "

I make a great plunge; it is like taking a header into a cold tub on a frosty morning.

"Hugh! " (twisting a rosary of jet beads that I have about my neck, round my fingers.) "Would you mind my telling her not to come? "

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Hugh opens his brown eyes very wide, wider than ever Providence intended those windows to his worthy soul to be thrown open.

"Tell her not to come! after having offered her a home, to slink out of it; leave her, poor girl, without a roof to shelter her pretty head in! why, Nell, you must be joking! "

"Joking! " I cry, passionately; "if you knew all, you would not think it a joking matter. I cannot breathe in the same house with her! "

Hugh comes over, and pulls me down on the sofa beside him. "You must have a slate off this morning, Nell! wind blew it off last night! Ha! Ha! cannot breathe in the same house with your only sister! such a big house too; you must require a deal of fresh air! you have been squabbling by post, I suppose! "

"It's no case of squabbling! " I say, very earnestly, while I feel my white cheeks getting crimson; "oh, Hugh, I have something to tell you—something I must tell you—oh, I wish it was not so hard! "

"If it is anything about Dolly; anything she has done wrong, or any scrape she has got into, I don't seem to care about hearing about it! " says Hugh. "I daresay she'd sooner I didn't, you know, and there is no use crying over spilt milk. "

"It's about myself, too! " I say, in great agitation.

Hugh puts his kind arm round me, and looks with incredulous amused eyes at my half averted face. "Some dreadful crime you have been committing, eh? not said 'Amen' loud enough in church, or pitched into Bentham, for giving your back hair a tug? "

His utter unsuspectingness stabs me.

"Oh, don't, don't laugh! " I cry, piteously; "you wouldn't if you knew. "

There is nothing on earth that Hugh hates so much as a scene, and he fears that one is imminent. "I've got something to tell you too, " he says, cheerily, rising and walking towards his escritoire; "and as mine seems to be the pleasantest piece of news, I'll have it out first; yours will keep, I'm sure! "

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I remain sitting on the sofa where he left me, twisting my hands about, and wishing, oh how heartily! that this confession, of the gravity of which my husband is so utterly unsuspecting, were well over, and I turned out of doors once for all. Presently he comes back with a small red leather case in his hand, and sits down again beside me.

"Do you remember, Nell, " he says, composing his jolly face to a decent gravity, befitting, as he thinks the subject; "do you remember telling me once that you had nothing but a photograph of—of—your poor father? "

"Yes, " I say, wincing; "don't talk about him! " (nobody ever mentions his name to me now, I cannot bear it.)

"I won't, I won't! " says Hugh apologetically; "not more than I can help at least, but I have had this done for you, and I want you to take one look at it, if you don't mind. "

He unfastens the case, takes out a large gold locket, with the monogram A. L. in diamonds upon it, and after fumbling a little about the spring, opens it with his big, kind, clumsy fingers.

I look half reluctant, and in an instant the tears come rushing to my eyes. I see again the kind blue eyes; the humorous tender smile that the coffin lid hid away from me six dreary weeks ago; it is my old man come to life again, only that hat the artist has painted out half the weary care lines; my old man, as he was before his troubles, came upon him; as he will be—oh, no! he will look yet nobler and beautifuller, and peacefuller then—when he comes to meet me at the golden gates.

I throw my arms round Hugh's neck; it is the first time that I ever kissed him voluntarily in my life. Poor Hugh! my emotion is hardly of the pleasurable kind that he had hoped and intended. He looks uneasily concerned, and I see his mouth forming itself into his favourite whistling shape.

"I did not mean to upset you like this, Nell! " he says, by-and-by.

"Oh, you are so good to me! " I cry, incoherently; "and I'm not at all good to you! Oh, I do so wish that I liked you better! I do so wish that I had always liked you! "

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Hugh pats my hair very fondly.

"My dear old woman!" he says, "let bygones be bygones! don't let us rake up any old grievances; it don't make much odds if you hated me like poison once, so as you don't hate me now!"

We sit silent for a few minutes. Hugh whistles 'Polly Perkins' very softly to himself, while doubt and vacillation enter my mind.

My husband's words keep ringing in my ears. "Let bygones be bygones!" Is he right? Would not it be better to "let the dead past bury its dead?" Have I not done him enough injury already, coming to him so meanly, taking all his love and his kind words and caresses, and giving him nothing in return but sour looks and peevish tears, and dimmed beauty; without lacerating that honest heart unnecessarily, by telling him that his wife is unfaithful to him; if not in deed, at least in heart and thought.

The temptation is gone, never to return; why not let that secret remain between God and my own heart? But if I abandon my confession, I must also abandon my revenge; the one involves the other.

"I often think," says Hugh, with more gravity than is his wont, "that one great cause of there being so much unhappiness in married life is people's expecting too much of one another, I don't want us to split on that rock, Nell. I should like you to look a bit happier certainly by-and-by; and to seem a bit gladder to see me, when I come to speak to you, if you can; but if not, why we must rub on as we are, and I'm very thankful to Providence for having given you to me at all!"

"Providence made you but a shabby present!" I say, with contrition.

"Not much to brag of, I daresay;" says Hugh playfully, pulling my ear, "but you see I am easily pleased. Well, I must be going out; I cannot stop molly-coddling away half a morning at a foolish little woman's apron strings; and I say, Nell, you go and talk to the old lady about Dolly, and drop the poor girl a line to tell her we shall be very glad to see her any day she likes to come; and don't let me hear any more nonsense about envy, hatred and malice and all uncharitableness!"

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"But I do hate her! I have every reason to hate her! Hugh! Hugh! " I call after him eagerly, but he has beaten a hasty retreat, to avoid further discussion of the subject.

CHAPTER XVII.

"VENGEANCE is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord! " Of all the texts of scripture, that is the one that kept saying itself over and over again to my heart, as I sat that morning listening in respectful silence, while Lady Lancaster went on purring about Lady Brandreth's crochet needles, and the fleecy wool she had to send to Glasgow for—could not get it in England, my dear, tried every shop in Regent Street.

Do you know that after all my blustering and threats and big resolutions, I am beginning to think that I must leave that said vengeance in the hands of Him to whom it appertains; that I must not meddle with the attributes of the Omnipotent. I have cooled down from my first fever of indignant hate. I am not the stuff of which Jaels are made. My fingers would have trembled so that I could never have hammered the nail into my prostrate enemy's tired brows. I should have fallen to pitying him; lying there so weary, so helpless, so trustful. I am beginning to doubt whether I will bring the last of the old name—name for ever hallowed by my father's having worn it, to disgrace and shame, whether despite all her misdoings, I will turn her out adrift and homeless on the world.

I am beginning to see my own sins very clearly, and not only other people's. Will not Dolly's tormenting presence in my house, the sound of her silky voice, the sight of her subtle beauty triumphing over the ruins of my life, be a fit penance for my own wickedness? Can any expiation be too hard, too bitter, for the woman who fell so low, as to ask another man to run away with her from her husband? who was only saved from utter shipwreck by the untainted nobility of soul, the self- less devotion and honour of her lover himself.

"Your sister Dorothea had a charming crochet tricoter, pattern, when last she was here, my dear, she seemed a beautiful worker, quite different from you, Nell; by-the-by, I am afraid that the hunting season will be over before poor dear Hugh's waistcoat is finished; she will be a great assistance to me, I fancy, when she comes to us next week. Did she say what day we were to expect her, my dear? "

"No. "

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"Have you written to her, my love? because if not, had not you better go and do so immediately? "

"There's plenty of time," I say indolently, "it is not near post hour. "

"There is never any use in procrastination, my dear, as my dear mother used often to say to me, when I was your age, and besides, I shall want you to come and pay a few calls with me this afternoon. You really must try and exert yourself a little more than you do, Nell; there is some- thing almost lethargic about you at times. "

So I retire and write a little icy note to my sister; telling her that my husband bids me say she is welcome to come any day she chooses, and that I am hers sincerely, Eleanor Lancaster.

The day of Dolly's advent comes, and the carriage is sent to the station for her. Hugh had suggested to me, to go to meet her in it; an honour which I steadfastly persist in declining. Lady Lancaster is writing letters in her own room, almost effacing with her long old nose the characters that she forms with her fingers. I am buried in an arm-chair in my boudoir, reading a novel. It interests me rather, for it is all about a married woman, who ran away from her husband and suffered the extremity of human ills in consequence. I have made several steps in morality of late I flatter myself, but even now, I can hardly imagine that I should have been very miserable if Dick had taken me away with him.

The naughty matron is just dying of a broken heart and starvation in a Peni- tentiary, when I hear carriage wheels. Postponing the last dying speech and confession of the faded flower, I jump up, run to the window, and peep behind the blinds. I am in time to see Dolly descend gracefully—my sister can get in and out of a carriage with any woman in England, not so easy an accomplishment as one might think—and hold out two little black hands effusively to Hugh.

Dolly gives one an impression of extreme blackness altogether. "Poor dear Papa" is written all over her, in best paramatta and deepest crape. Even the slender shapely legs that I caught a glimpse of a minute ago on the carriage step, look as if they belonged unmistakeably to a mourner.

"Nell! Nell! " shouts my domestic Stentor, but I respond not. Then I hear my husband's and sister's voices approaching me.

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"She's not here, I'm sure, " Hugh is saying, "or she would have answered when I called; she always does; she's out, I'm afraid. " He opens the boudoir door. "She is here after all; why, old woman, what has become of your manners? come and say how do you do to Dolly?"

Dolly is advancing rapidly to precipitate herself on my neck, but something in my face keeps her back, and alters her intention.

"How do you do? " I say very coldly, not even holding out my hand to her.

Hugh looks from one to the other puzzled and uncomfortable.

"Well, I suppose you two have got a hundred and one things to say to one another, and would only be wishing me at the other end of nowhere if I were to stop, so I'll make myself scarce, " he says cheerfully, and then he goes out, and shuts the door behind him.

We stand opposite each other like two fighting cocks for a minute or so; then Dolly sinks into a chair.

"As you don't appear to intend to invite me to take a seat, I suppose I must invite myself, " she says, smiling; "you certainly have the *manière prévenante*, Nell, which is becoming so rapidly extinct. "

"I have; have I? "

"You know how to welcome the coming, and I should imagine also how to speed the parting guest. "

"I do, do I? "

The delicate carnation is deepening in my sister's cheeks; those cheeks that look smoother and clearer than ever in their crape setting.

"I hardly know how to break the news to you, but I'm afraid I shall not be able to trespass on your hospitality long. "

"Hm! are you going to betake yourself to a better world? " I ask ironically; "you certainly are too good for this. "

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"I'm going to make a home for myself! " says my sister, with calm triumph; "I am going to marry Lord Stockport. "

I stand for a moment dumb-founded, aghast. Where, where is my story-book code of morality? Where is the whipping for the naughty boy? Here is a young woman who has told lies, has forged, has wrecked the happiness of her sister's whole life, and she is punished; how? —why by marrying a lord with £80,000 a year. Truly poetic justice is confined to poetry indeed; and comes down never to the prose dealings of every day life.

"Lord Stockport! " I ejaculate, "happy man! "

An angry scintillation flashes from Dolly's superb black eyes.

"He is to be pitied, isn't he, poor man? his wife cannot bring him the ample stock of affection and fidelity that Sir Hugh Lancaster's did him! Of course not! that goes without saying. "

"She can bring him a large stock of accomplishments though! " I say quickly, breathing short and hard.

Miss Lestrangle looks as if she did not exactly see the drift of this observation; she says "Après? " interrogatively.

"Lady Stockport's list of talents will be longer than Desdemona's even; " I say very bitterly. "So delicate with her needle! an admirable musician! —oh, she would sing the savageness out of a bear—of so high and plenteous a wit and invention—and can imitate her neighbour's handwriting so excellently. "

Dolly gives a start, a perceptible start, but recovers herself immediately.

"What do you mean? " she asks quietly; "you ought to be published with a key or a commentary! " But I see her fingers tightening their hold upon the back of her chair.

I go over to my writing table, and take out a letter. "This is what I mean! " I say, very slowly, holding it up before her; "I am sure Lord Stockport will prize the gift of your hand all the more, when he sees how clever it is! I intend to keep this to show him! "

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The carmine retires rather rapidly from my sister's cheeks, and from her full lips also as she scans the document.

"Are you quite so sure that you will be Lady Stockport now? " I ask very softly.

We are silent a minute; then Dolly says very sharply—none of the old sweetness in her tone, "How did you get this? you must have been seeing that man again? "

It is not a bad idea carrying the war into the enemies' quarters, is it?

"It is not much matter to you how I got it; it is enough for you to know that I have got it. "

"Of course! of course! only it is a pity that any detail should be wanting to complete such a pretty story. "

"It will be quite complete enough for Lord Stockport, I daresay! " I say very drily.

"And for Hugh? " asks Dolly, with a little vicious smile.

"We will be impartial! " I say coldly, "they shall both hear it. "

Dolly laughs softly, and the colour comes back with a deeper, fuller rush to her face. "Resurrection of Daddy Long-legs! a tragedy in two acts, " she says derisively. If I have expected to overwhelm my sister with the damning proofs of her guilt, I am disappointed. As the petrel is popularly supposed to rejoice in the storm, so Dolly appears almost to riot in the war of the moral elements; "to be put on the boards of the Wentworth theatre, what day, Nell? let us be exact! "

"To-day! " I cry, raising my voice, my hard kept composure giving way, and merging into honest passionate anger, "there is never any use in delaying the exposure of crime. "

"Impossible, my dear! " says my sister, with a shrug, "one of the principal actors will be absent. Stockport does not come till Saturday! "

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"Poor man! " I say compassionately, "it will be a pleasant surprise for him discovering that his wife is a forger. " Dolly subsides into gravity.

"I never objected to people calling a spade a spade; I suppose I am a forger; but to my thinking, the end justifies the means, and has done so in this case; there is one commandment I am sorry for having broken, and only one! "

"Which? "

"The eleventh, peculiarly appropriated to woman's use. 'Thou shall not be found out! '" replies Dolly with composure.

"Unfortunately you have broken it! " I say, struggling to emulate her calmness, "and now you must pay the penalty! "

"Don't let us have any threatening, it is not lady-like; let us be lady-like whatever we are! " says Dolly, standing up, and sweeping gracefully over towards the door. "Have me up for forgery if you like—'Scandal in high life; ' it would make the fortune of the Nantford Advertiser; drag the old name through the dirt; it will annoy you far more than it will me, to tell you the truth. I have never been very much in love with either Stockport or respectability, so that the loss of neither will quite break my heart. "

A knock at the door.

"May I come in? " in an old croaky voice, and without waiting for permission, a long reddish nose, a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles and a beard make their appearance.

We both look rather foolish, like little naughty boys whose pockets have been found bulging with the illicit marble, or the succulent bull's-eye in church. Simultaneously, we vault off our high horses.

"I am afraid, I'm interrupting a pleasant tête-à-tête! " says the old lady, pokerishly, "but I heard your voice, my dear Dorothea, and I thought I must come in and just say how d'ye do to you. Are not you very tired after your journey, my dear child? those cross lines are so fatiguing; so many changes, and having to look after your own luggage too. I suppose it is an old fashioned notion on my part, but I never can reconcile myself to the idea of young people travelling

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alone. So many unpleasant contretemps have occurred of late, too; no communication between the carriages, and since that dreadful affair of Mr. Briggs too! "

"You did not interrupt us at all, dear Lady Lancaster, " says Dolly, whom the old woman's babble has given time to recover her aplomb; "we had nearly finished our chat, hadn't we, Nell? "

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT is the twentieth day of February, in the year of our Lord 186—. The violets, like Noah's dove, are poking their noses out of doors, to see what sort of weather it is. They are beginning to quit their wintry lodgment.

"Where they together
All the hard weather

Dead to the world, keep house unknown. " White ones—plenty of them—are peeping out modestly, from among freshest green leaves, on the sunny south side of Lestrange churchyard, above the prone heads of the human flowers, to whom the spring time of Resurrection is long in coming. Sir Adrian Lestrange loved them so dearly; every spring he used to come with his little daughter Nell to look for them, and smile his friendly welcome to them and the celandines that carpet goldenly the space beneath the old black-budded ashes.

Sir Adrian does not come this spring; he is 'away' good man! He has travelled to a land where there are better flowers than his pretty violets, and where he and his little Nell can walk about together in peace, without any 'cloaked shadow' coming between to part them, as they have been parted for just a little space—a little bitter minute—here below.

The celandines are spreading their gaudy carpet also beneath the elms and sycamores in Sir Hugh Lancaster's garden at Wentworth. They are flaring and flaunting away with such confident pertness; just for all the world as if they were real garden flowers, and did not deserve to be extirpated every bit as much as the poor daisies that were always being ruthlessly spudded up.

The first breath of spring is blowing about the land; she is raising herself a little out of winter's snowy lap, waking up and rubbing her fair eyes. I have been late for prayers again, and have received a mild jobation in consequence.

Breakfast is over now, and Lady Lancaster and I are standing at the Hall door, watching our Hugh mount his hack to ride to a rather

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distant meet. Hugh looks his best acock horse; one does not see how short he is, and he has the best seat in —shire.

"How well Hugh looks on horseback!" exclaims the Dowager, never weary of admiring her son, though the spectacle is anything but a novel one to her.

"He does not look amiss in pink," I respond, less rapturously, but still with commendation in my tone; for to give myself my due, I am growing to love Hugh with all love

"—— except the love
Of man and woman, when they love their best
Closest and sweetest——"

The last vestige of my lord's red coat having disappeared round a bend in the drive, I turn away and stroll up and down the terrace by myself. The sun is getting a little power; he beats quite warmly on my uncovered head, and I saunter and potter about slowly, and watch the crocuses, yellow, and purple, and striped forcing their way up through the rich red earth. A small fat cock robin is sitting on the stone balustrades, singing his little heart out. I stand pensively listening to him.

"I wish I was as happy as you!" I say to myself; "I do indeed! it would be so pleasant!"

There is a little sound of pebbles being swept along, and looking up, I see Dolly coming along to meet me; Dolly in a tight fitting black dress, which shows every curve and turn of her exquisite figure, and relieved about neck and wrists by the nattiest of white linen collar and cuffs. It is not every one that can blend the afflictive and the becoming as our Dolly can. Dolly looks lovelier in the early morning, in her every day gown, than when dressed, or undressed—as the mode now has it—for ball or opera.

"Delicious morning, isn't it?" says my sister stopping beside me, and sniffing the sweet fresh air, with her little Greek nose.

"Yes."

"What a pretty place it is!" surveying admiringly the wide formal gardens, where terraces, gravel walks, Deodaras, urns recur with

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almost as tedious a monotony as the knops and flowers in the Tabernacle decorations.

"Not particularly, I don't think! "

"If people only knew what was for their own good! " with a gentle sigh, "you ought to be a very happy woman, Nell! "

"You have done your best to make me so, at all events! "

"I did evil that good might come, as I told you yesterday, when that exemplary old tabby interrupted us—by-the-by I hope she had not been eaves-dropping—and good has come, " says Dolly steadily; "apropos of that, I have some- thing to tell you; Stockport comes to-day. "

"Well? "

"Oh nothing particular, of course; only I thought I had better tell you, so that you might have your weapon ready to stab the poor soul with, as soon as he arrives. "

Dolly is not agitated, she never is; "wise men never wonder, " and "with the wisdom of the children of this world" none can deny that Dorothea is dowered. Perhaps it is my fancy that there is rather an anxious light in the great dreamy sensuous eyes, that the flush on the oval cheeks is deeper than what the soft south wind has brought there.

"Thanks, " I say, very coldly; and then I go and lean my arms on the balustrade—our talking has scared away the robin—and look wistfully off over the landscape, winking in the morning sun, to the East, whither my heart has gone. One would have thought, wouldn't one, that Dolly having told her errand, would straightway have returned again whence she came, but such does not seem to be her intention. She comes, on the contrary, and leans on the rough cold stone beside me.

"Let us understand one another, Nell, " she says, with some slight hesitation, "are you really bent on exhibiting that unlucky document, or is it only a boggy that you are keeping to frighten me into good behaviour with? "

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"I thought we had understood each other perfectly the other night, and that there was no need for fresh explanations, " I say icily, "I imagined that I had made my meaning tolerably clear then. "

"And about yourself? " she says quickly; "have you considered what awkward inquiries it will entail, inquiries too from a person who has the best right in the world to make them, and who cannot be put off, as you have put off me with, 'it is enough for you that I have got it. ' Hugh must be more or less than human if he is not a little curious to know how you came by it. Lords with £80,000 a year don't grow on every hedge; it is worth while eating a little dirt for one of them, isn't it? "

I turn round and face her.

"Do you think, " I say eagerly, "that if it entailed the loss of my life, I should very much care; thanks to you, I may say, with Agag 'surely the bitterness of death is past. '"

Dolly looks down and draws geometrical patterns with her slender pointed foot.

"I know you won't believe me, so it's rather wasting breath asseverating, " she says slowly, "but I give you my word of honour I did it for the best; I thought that it was a childish besotment you had for that man; a sort of calf love, that it would be a real kindness to help you out of. "

"Without an *arrière pensée* for your own advantage of course; it would have been truer kindness to have cut my throat for my own good! " I end passionately. My voice shakes and wavers in my intense self-pity; I am afraid of breaking down into weeping before her, into "howling, " "blubbering, " "snivelling, " as she in her dry-eyed contemptuousness would graphically phrase it; so I rush away, away to the house, and up to my chamber, like Joseph, to weep there. For an hour or more I sit with my two hands holding my head, buried in thought. Woe is me if my mamma-in-law catches me; small opinion has she of thought as an employment for the female sex, and then I rise, unlock the drawer of my writing table, take out the 'unlucky document, ' as its parent leniently calls it, and go downstairs with it.

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I find Dolly sitting by the library fire, her small white left hand on which Lord Stockport's great diamond betrothal ring is flashing and sparkling in the firelight—bitter, bitter will be the parting between Dolly and that jewel of price—is pushed in amongst the black wealth of her scented hair; she is staring with her great dark velvet eyes at the shining bars; her cheeks and small round ears are getting burnt a dull red, but she does not seem to heed that. I go up close to her, and stoop over her.

"Dolly! " I say with solemnity, "I have thought a great deal about my revenge upon you; I have lain awake at night planning it; it has seemed meat and drink to me for the last week. I have finished planning it out now, look! "

As I speak I toss the letter into the fire's innermost heart, and watch the flames catch hold of it, and then shoot up high; watch it turn brown; then writhe like a thing in pain; then shrivel away utterly. Dolly jumps up and throws her arms about my neck.

"Don't, " I say, gently disengaging myself; "keep your blandishments for the lover you have saved; I think he would appreciate them more. "

So you see I gave up my revenge; I did not carry the stone in my pocket for seven years; then turn it, and carry it for seven years more. I yielded up my injuries unto Him, who claims the redressing of all the injustices that have been wrought since the world was. I had been clamouring for justice, bare justice. Alas, if bare justice is all I myself get, in that day when the world's long tangled accounts are made up, where shall I be?

"What shall I, frail man be pleading?
Who for me be interceding
When the Just is Mercy needing? "

"A very worthy young man, my dear, I don't doubt, " says Lady Lancaster to me, a morning or two afterwards, apropos of my brother-in-law elect, as we sit pecketting at our work in the morning room—Hugh's waistcoat is making rapid strides towards completion—looking at me over the top of her spectacles, "very worthy, indeed! does not seem to have very much to say for himself perhaps, but that is a fault on the right side in these days, when all

young people seem to think that they cannot have too much of the sound of their own voices! "

"He is rather silent! " I say, which is certainly putting it in a very mild form, seeing that I could count with ease on the fingers of one hand the remarks he has made since he entered our hospitable portals.

"Dear me! " pursues the old lady, wandering off into reminiscences, "how well I remember his grandfather's shop to be sure! He was a hosier, you know, my dear, in Bond Street, a very civil old man with a bald head, I recollect—this young man has a look of him now and then—he used to come out to one's carriage door to take orders, and that sort of thing, my dear! "

"It is a very up-py and down-y world! " I say sententiously.

"If he had told me then, " continues my companion, making her speech more emphatic by uplifted and out-spread right hand, "that forty years from that time, my son and his grandson would be marrying two sisters, I should have withdrawn my custom from his shop for his impertinence. "

I laugh.

"It is a rise, whose suddenness is only paralleled by Dick Whittington's and his cat; in fact, it beats them, for Dick was only Lord Mayor after all, and Stockport is Lord, without the Mayor! "

Meanwhile, the 'worthy young man' and Dolly are strolling up and down the terrace. Dolly seems to like to keep within view of the windows. I fancy that the young Viscount's amenities become ponderous, when freed from the restraint of the public eye.

So Dolly is to be wed; she is to be made a Viscountess of; to be elevated to a throne among the Gods. King Cophetna has given his hand to the Beggar Maid, and she is tripping daintily up to seat herself beside that august and condescending monarch.

But when is it to be? When are the festive poles to be run up, and the "healths to the houses of Stockport and Lestrange" to float in the breeze?

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At first, Dolly stoutly maintained that no earthly power should induce her to allow her marriage to be celebrated till a full year had elapsed, since "poor dear Papa's" death.

"O, impossible! quite out of the question! so disrespectful to his memory! Did he suppose she had no natural affection?" &c., &c. When first the subject was hinted, she retreated from the room with her handkerchief to her eyes; not angry, but so hurt.

This I hear from Hugh.

"Completely upset, poor girl!" he says, pulling his thick moustache, and staring at his boots, which are stuck out straight before him; "so Stockport tells me. He thought he had put his foot into it with a vengeance, and that she was not going to speak to him again for a month of Sundays."

The text about polishing the sepulchres of the Righteous occurs to me, but I keep it to myself.

"If ever I have any daughters," says Hugh—I look down—"I hope they'll be as fond of me as you two were of him."

(You two! classing us together! My God! that is hard to bear!)

"I'm sure I wish she would marry him, and have done with it," continues Hugh, yawning. "Great Sawney! I'm getting dog-tired of seeing his ugly mug about the house; seems to be in every room at once too, like a bird; he's a thundering lout, that's what he is!"

"If you will be so Quixotically generous as to bring all your wife's relations, like a hornet's nest, about your ears, you must take the consequences," I say, a little maliciously.

Time does wonders, and time and Lord Stockport succeeded in softening our Dolly's tender scruples.

"One cannot always consult one's own feelings in this world," I overheard her saying one day to Hugh, "else, (with a gentle sigh) things would be very different, but for poor Stockport's sake—he really is getting so miserably unsettled and fretful—ah, I know some one who can feel for him; some one who was not too patient himself once, a hundred years ago—that I am afraid it will tell upon his

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health; that would not be fair, would it? and so"—(with down dropped eyes and a blush.) And so a judicious compromise has been effected between the bridegroom's eagerness, and the bride's filial devotion. He had clamoured for April, and she had stickled for December. June is a happy mean between the two, and June it is to be.

I had begged that the wedding might be a very quiet one; the idea of a great gathering, of all the onerous duties of mistress of a great house coming upon me for the first time, of feasting and merry making in the midst of my deep mourning was utterly repellant to me. But I am overruled by my mamma, as I have been on many other occasions.

"Life is too short to be spent in vain repinings, my dear, " she says to me one morning, after we have been indulging in a mild wrangle on the subject; "there are duties owing to the living as well as to the dead, and we should not selfishly neglect the former for the latter. "

I make no answer, but bend my head in silence over my work. "It seems to me, " pursues the old lady, rather exasperated by my silence, "that there is something unchristian in such exaggerated grief; it is a sure argument of an ill-regulated mind; you seem to forget that there is such a virtue as Resignation, one of the most beautiful of Christian graces, or that our Heavenly Father knows what is best for us! " Lady Lancaster has none of her son's shyness in mentioning the Deity. On the contrary, her Heavenly Father plays a large part in her conversation, particularly when she is angry.

"It's very easy to be resigned to one's Heavenly Father, when he does nothing to vex one, " I cry passionately, ignoring the fifth commandment, or perhaps imagining that it does not apply to parents-in-law. The Dowager rises very stiffly, and makes her flat back flatter than ever.

"If you are going to be blasphemous, my dear, " she says "I have nothing more to say; we must drop the subject, if you please! " and she sweeps out of the room with dignity. Dropping the subject means that I apologize, and that the old lady gets her own way. And so March, and April, and May—blowiest, tearfullest and sweetest of the daughters of the year—steal past us; march quickly by to join the other dead months and years; go over to the majority as the Romans

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have it. And there comes a sultry day in early June—day when my sister's life began to open, and mine, I think, to close.

“Happy the bride that the sun shines on, ' the proverb says, doesn't it? ” asks Hugh that morning, lying staring lazily out of window at the pale blue sky, and the Scotch firs, and the rooks cawing and flapping about their windy homes; “if that's the case, I'm afraid you have not a chance of coming in for much luck, have you, Nell? You had not a ha'porth of sun from 'Dearly Beloved, ' to 'Amazement. ”

I am up and dressed already.

“Proverbs often tell lies, ” I say carelessly. “Honesty is the best policy; It is better to be good than pretty; Early birds pick the worm; what can be greater fiction than those three? ”

“We shall have the house to ourselves to night, Nell! ” says Hugh cheerfully, “that'll be a comfort, won't it? ”

“Ye-es, ” I say rather doubtfully, “at least do you know, Hugh, I sometimes wish that somebody would take it into their head to marry your mother; some meek-minded old gentleman that she could rule with a rod of iron, and make muffetees for, and read 'A Voice from the Pit, ' or 'A few plain words about sinners, ' to. ”

Hugh bursts out into a loud haw! haw!

“Oh! I say, Nell! too bad! what's the Mater been doing now? slanging you, or giving you good little books to read? ”

“A little of both, perhaps! ” I say, laughing.

Wentworth Church is a mile from Wentworth House; just outside the park it stands; ugly, square-windowed, ivy-less. Sir Hugh's work people and tenants have been as zealous in doing honour to his sister-in-law, as if she were a real Lancaster. There is a big arch at the first gate; a bigger at the second, and a biggest at the church gate.

June has such a wealth of roses that she can spare a good many to scatter under Dolly's feet, without missing them. The deer raise their slender smoky heads to look surprisedly at these monstrosities that have sprung up like mushrooms after rain, and then go leaping lightly away through the deep bracken.

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The churchyard is full of people; there is quite a struggle for the vantage ground of the high flat tombstones, that give one always an idea of grim ghastly boxes. The children have had their faces washed as if it were Sunday; the women are bobbing curtseys, and the men pulling shaggy forelocks, as we float and rustle up the scarlet cloth put to the chancel door. There are twelve bridesmaids, six innocents in blue, and six in pink; it has been a work of some labour and thought to get that spinster dozen together.

Female friends Dolly has none, holding—was it Cowper's opinion—that women's friendships were leagues of folly and interest; and it has been difficult to collect, at least in a country neighbourhood, twelve young ladies of fit standing, to walk behind Lady Stockport to the altar. It rather a scratch team after all; we have been obliged to eke it out with an old maid and a child.

Little De Laney is best man; not that has any peculiar affection or admiration for the bridegroom, as indeed he told me afterwards that he was 'the biggest fool out, ' but because Lord Stockport once shed the radiance of his presence over the corps of which De Laney is a member.

A bishop in very clear lawn sleeves and painfully thin legs, with two High Church rectors, officiate. They all read very fast, and leave out as much as they possibly can, so that whatever else it is, at least the service cannot be said to be tedious. And so the 'august ceremony, ' as the county newspapers said next day, is consummated, and Dolly draws a sigh of relief. I think he is glad that the costly brittle cup has reached her red lips in safety at last. And then we all get into our carriages and bowl home, with the 'ugly duck- ling' transformed within the last quarter of an hour into a swan leading the way.

"This is the room we danced in last year, isn't it? " Lord Capel says to me, at breakfast.

"Yes, " I say, "it looks so different without its furniture, doesn't it? "

Lady Lancaster like the fisherman's wife, Ilsabil, has had her own will, and the gathering is as large as even she could wish.

Looking down the long table, on either side of the forest of ferns and flowers and pyramidal fruit, I see happy people—these in Elise-ian bonnets—those in Poole-ian coats laughing and talking nonsense.

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The bridegroom is doing neither; he is eating 'poulet au truffes' and looking solemnly amorous, and amorously solemn. I fancy that his impending speech is weighing on his mind, and he is wishing that a fellow might be allowed to get married without having to jaw about it. Happiest, noisiest, gorgeousest of apparel, frequentest of laugh among the guests are the Coxes; all except Mortimer Spencer de Lacy, behind whose barnacles the bitter tear of disappointment keeps swelling.

The Coxes are not presentable certainly, but I insisted on their being asked. I have a kindness for them; they were good to my poor Dick.

"There have been a good many changes since then, " says Lord Capel, pleasantly thinking of my marriage.

"Indeed, there have! " I say, with a slight shudder.

"Everyone that was here last year is here now! " he continues, looking round n the assembled faces; "with one exception. "

"Who is the exception, Capel? " asks De Laney, who is on the other side of me, "proves the rule, doesn't it, eh? "

"No, nonsense! M'Gregor, don't you recollect poor M'Gregor? "

"Why poor? " I ask, trying to smile; "for not being here? "

"Havn't you heard? oh, I thought you were sure to; I'm sorry I mentioned the subject. "

"Why? " I ask, hoarsely.

"Oh, because it's a shame to introduce melancholy subjects on an occasion like this; bad omen, you know. Stockport would not thank me. "

"You had better go on, now you have begun, " says De Laney, "or we shall think it something worse than it is. "

"Well then, poor fellow! he is dead! I heard of it a day or two ago, from a man who was quartered on the same station with him; died of fever and ague at Lahore! very sad thing! nobody he cared a straw about near him. "

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"Dead! " cries Violet Coxe, overhearing, in her hard loud voice;
"poor M'Gregor! Lord! how sorry I am! "

The bride suddenly rises from her seat, and comes rushing over to me.

"For God's sake, don't expose yourself! "

I hear her whispering very eagerly, and then there sounds a loud buzzing in my ears; a deadly sickness comes over me, and I faint away, as I fainted away five months ago, in those strong arms that will never more embrace any bride but corruption.

"The knight's bones are dust,
And his good sword rust,
His soul is with the saints, I trust. "

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CHAPTER XIX.

JUNE 7th, 186—. I am coming to the last in my series of pictures from a life that has been, alas! "Failure, crowning failure, failure from end to end."

My foolish little tale has been dull enough in the telling, I'm afraid; it was not dull in the acting, Heaven knows! It is two years and a half ago now, since that wintry night, when, in my wicked madness, I wanted to sacrifice soul and body to my one, my only love; since he said to me, but in tenderer, more impassioned words,

"I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more."

Since then, I have been sorry for my sin; at least I have tried to be. I have been a good wife to Hugh too; I think he would tell you so, if you asked him. It has been up-hill, tiring work, and I have often got out of breath, but it is nearly over now. Yes, my friends, I ask you to bid me God speed, for I am going very far journey, "*je vais chercher un grand peut-être.*"

I am dying, and the great smith who strikes off all fetters, is knocking off mine. In the Litany, you know, we pray for deliverance from sudden death, and my prayer has certainly been answered. Never did anyone leave the world with more lagging, lingering feet, than I am going. I am able to watch the steps of my own dissolution. My beauty and my strength are gone from me: they were sorry to go, I think; they went so slowly and I shall not be long after them now.

Until last winter, I always thought I should live to be an old woman, —like my mother-in-law, perhaps; bony, grenadier-like, hirsute of lip, and baggy of cheek,

"With a little hoard of maxims, Preaching down a daughter's heart." But about last Christmas, the idea struck me, came home to me, that never should gray hairs and I make acquaintance; that my head would be laid down in its ruddy glory, before very long, in the chilly sombre vault of the Lancasters. (Oh, if they would but lay me among mine own people!) I looked very well, certainly—Hugh's men friends complimented him (so he told me) on his wife's beauty; such rosy cheeks I had too; I, who used to be pale to a proverb; and my

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rosy cheeks did not come out of the rouge pot, as the Dowager's wigged compeers curiously hinted to that irate old matron.

But surely, surely I was getting oddly, unaccountably thin: my rings took to slipping off my fingers, and rolling into remote corners, and all "me frocks," like Glorvina's, of lovelorn memory, "had to be took in." Also I somehow stopped very often, and leant against the carved banisters; as I went up the shallow, broad oak steps of the grand staircase. One day I spoke out my thought.

"Mother," I said, (Hugh liked me to call her mother), "don't you think I'm getting to look very like Jane Stevens, that died of consumption at the West Lodge, last year?"

"Nonsense, my dear," answered the old lady, very hastily, "you should not get fanciful; young people of your age often look delicate in such cold weather; don't imagine anything so silly!"

But she was very much flurried as she spoke, her old nose got red, and two big tears dropped on to her eternal knitting. I asked no more questions; I said no more on the subject, but from that day, I knew that my fate was sealed. So I was going to die; going to be erased from the number of the warm kindly living; going to be numbered with the cold, cold dead, whose battle is over, whose race is run. In their successive generations, "God's finger touched them and they slept." Soon, that dread finger would be laid upon me, and there could be no shrinking from under it. I could see quite plain a new tablet over our pew, in Wentworth's dark old church: I could read the black letters traced distinctly on the white marble, "Hic jacet Eleanora."

The next Lady Lancaster would be spelling out the Latin words, instead of minding her prayers, would be picturing to herself this dead Eleanora to whom but two and twenty summers had been vouchsafed.

But where should I myself be at this time? Oh, thought full of unspeakable awe! How that prayer comes home to the souls of all us miserable sinners; a thousand fold more, then, to those of us, who are on the verge of that dark, dark flood!

"Rex tremendæ majestatis
Qui salvandos salvas gratis

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Salva me, fons pietatis. "

"King of majesty tremendous,
Who dost free salvation, send us
Fount of Pity! then befriend us. "

Oh, noble verse! simple utterance of a soul trembling and abased to the dust before that King of kings, that Lord of lords. Those must have been holy men, those monks, who put together those grand words. No doubt they agonized to enter at that straight gate; no doubt they sinned, and suffered, and wept as we do now; and oh! in mercy let us hope that they are—

Where God for aye
Shall wipe away
All tears from every eye. "

I wondered much within myself whether I were going to a good place; I rather fancied not; I certainly had no ground for hoping that I was. Heaven had shared but few of my thoughts hitherto.

All the love and aspirations I had to bestow had been squandered on that intense earthly passion which seemed to be eating up body and soul. It was too late to mend now, but I was sorry it had been so.

Yet still, on that one subject which had dominated my whole life, I felt easier and more comfortable than I had been for a long time. I no longer wept in secret, nor felt a gnawing, wearing, mighty longing to see that one face again. He was gone from me but a very little way; just— "From this room into the next. " I had known I could not live without him, and I was not going to do so. God was very good and pitying; he was going to release me from the long pain of existence, and through the grave and gate of death I should pass to my beloved; should see his hero face immortal then in its beauty, so that "decay's effacing fingers" could never sweep its hues.

"You'll be all right again, when the spring comes round, darling little girl! " Hugh would say to me, cheerily, now and then, and would smooth my hair with his kind brown hand, and I always said,

"Yes, dear old fellow, I dare say I shall! " though my all right was different from his.

Would not it be all right, would not it be passing well with me, when I had gone away with great gladness to be with my beloved for evermore?

"June 20th. —I am going so fast! oh, so fast! These are the last words I shall ever write; it is hard, laboursome to me to hold the pencil, but I do not want to leave the story of my poor life incomplete; incompleter at least than the story of all lives must be. Some other hand must put 'Finis' I know.

"It is night, and I am sitting in my old dad's chair, watching the stars silently taking their allotted places in the firmament. I have been gazing up into those depths of air unfathomable by mortal eyes, wondering how far up in those measureless tracts of ether, or whether in that direction at all, lie the spreading fields of light, rise the walls and towers, shine the golden streets of the holy city. 'A land where the inhabitant shall no more say I am sick.'

"What a pleasant thought. That text never struck me particularly when I was well. I suppose now that I am so full of aches and pains it comes home to me more. Oh God! am I going there? If I could but know for certain!

""In my father's house are many mansions. ' Perhaps that text has something to say to me; into one of the lowest of those mansions, perhaps into the very lowest of all, the Great Householder, who is ever holding his Marriage Feast, and calling thither whoso hungers, and is weary, may let me creep in, even me, for am I not weary, most weary? I have been trying (oh, vain endeavour) to picture to myself that land of unpictured, unpictureable passionless bliss—trying, with narrow human brain, to compass and take in the idea of the ineffable joys of the blessed souls of the just, in those unfading abodes which they have climbed up the steep ladder of faith to, at last; trying to conjure up before my mental vision—

""The shores where tideless sleep the seas of time,
Soft by the City of the Saints of God!'

"O Lord Jesus Christ! let me be in that city by this time to-morrow night! Grant me entrance there! Open to me when in fear and trembling I knock."

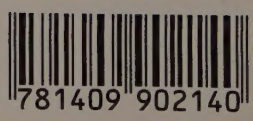
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Rhoda Broughton (1840-1920) was a novelist. During her lifetime she was one of the Queens of the Circulating Libraries. She developed a taste for literature, especially poetry, as a young girl. Her first two novels appeared in 1867 in *Dublin University Magazine*. By 1900 she had published 14 novels over a period of 30 years in *Bentley publishing house*. She was not rid of the reputation of creating fast heroes and easy morals, which was true enough for her novels, and thus suffered from the idea of her being merely slight and sensational. Very often Broughton's women are strong characters and in them she manages to subvert traditional images of femininity. This culminates in *A Wife's Progress* (1905), in which Broughton creates a married couple who turns everything traditional upside down and the wife fulfills the stereotypes of an older, rich husband. Her other works include *Cometh Up as a Flower* (1867), *Nancy* (1873), *Doctor Cupid* (1886) and *A Beginner* (1893).



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